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# Prison Space, Social Control and Relationships in a Post-Soviet Women's Prison

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**UNIVERSITY OF  
PLYMOUTH**

**PRISON SPACE, SOCIAL CONTROL AND RELATIONSHIPS IN A  
POST-SOVIET WOMEN'S PRISON**

by

**ARTA JALILI IDRISI**

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth  
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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(Researcher: what helps?) *I don't know - I don't know perhaps the belief in good. You know many tell me in life everything is black - I know anyway that there is white and it is hard to break this belief (Flame).*

It was this strong belief in good that inspired me and helped me to overcome my own personal struggles.

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However, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the women in Ilguciem Women's Prison as it is your story of pain, struggle and survival.

## Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another establishment.

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Signed A. Jalili Idrissi

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## **Abstract**

**Arta Jalili Idrissi**

### **Prison Space, Social Control and Relationships in a Post-Soviet Women's Prison**

This thesis attempts to capture, at the macro, meso and micro levels, the ideological rupture, which has emerged after the breakdown of the Soviet project in Latvia, and in particular its effect on penalty and women's imprisonment. This rupture has been conceptualized as a 'clash of the titans', which is the ongoing struggle between a Soviet legacy that refuses to die and an increasingly dominant neoliberal regime.

While the breakdown of Soviet hegemonic power signaled a victory for democracy and market economics, the spread of western liberal democracies has been a challenge for post-Soviet societies. While democratic traditions took centuries to evolve in western societies, the democratisation and establishment of neoliberalism in post-Soviet Latvia has been an abrupt process over a few short years. This forced time frame has brought societal problems, which have yet to be worked through.

This thesis will argue that for Latvians the collapse of the Soviet project meant not only transforming the socio-political economy, but has also led to the re-emergence of non-Soviet cultural traditions. The new political narratives tend to embrace a nationalistic and masculinized approach. Some sections of society have become increasingly excluded from influence, for example Russian-speakers. There is also a tendency for women to be excluded from equal influence. These cultural narratives, together with the growth of neoliberalism, has pushed Soviet influence and ideology away from mainstream Latvian society, and out to the most secluded and isolated places. Hence prisons are a last battle-ground for the two ideologically opposed 'titans' and a site of resistance to the new dominant culture.

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## **Abbreviations**

AI	Appreciative inquiry
CPT	European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
CSBL	Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
EFPSU	European Federation of Public Service Unions
EU	European Union
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IWP	Ilguciems Women's Prison
LPA	Latvian Prison Administration
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
TB	Tuberculosis
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America

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## **Chapter 1 Introduction: Post-Soviet Imprisonment and Beyond**

Latvia, like other post-Soviet states after the breakdown of the Soviet project,<sup>1</sup> was on a new liberal political trajectory, which required radical transformations within its society. The rupture with the communist ideological framework and an abrupt transition to a market economy had an immediate effect on all spheres of life. Western society viewed this transformation as a glorious victory for liberal democracy and some even suggested that it was ‘the end of history’ (Fukuyama, 1989), but the universalisation of Western liberal democracy proved to be a challenging process for post-Soviet society. The focus of this thesis, therefore, is how this ideological rupture after the breakdown of the Soviet project affected penalty. It specifically focuses on exploring how the Latvian penal system has adapted and positioned itself in a wider socio-political context of neoliberalism. In particular, it analyses how women’s imprisonment is being affected by the interplay between the Soviet legacy and the neoliberal agenda.

Throughout my thesis I refer to the ‘clash of the titans’, which implies the ongoing struggle between the Soviet legacy and the neoliberal socio-political and economic order. It seems that this clash is particularly evident within the post-Soviet prison context. It could be argued that prisons are the last large-scale institutional battleground for the two ideologically opposed ‘titans’. Women’s imprisonment in Latvia is an understudied field, and this is a first qualitative study of women’s carceral experiences, which is based on an ethnographic approach. The field of prison sociology

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the thesis the ‘Soviet project’ is used instead of the Soviet Union in order to highlight its unfinished nature and incompleteness, as the main aim of establishing communism was never achieved (this is further explained in Chapter 2).

has been globally dominated by the androcentric outlook and little attention has been paid to women as they account for a relatively small fraction of the prison population (Drake, Drake & Earle, 2015; Heidensohn & Silvestri, 2012). Some of the most influential male social and penal theorists such as Foucault, Garland, and Wacquant have been criticised for neglecting gender issues (see King, 2004; Measor, 2012; Gelsthorpe, 2010). As suggested by Brennan *et al.* (2018, p.4), too often in academic discussions women's involvement in the criminal justice system is 'marginalised, ignored or lost in the concerns about male crime'. The academic discipline of criminology for much of the 20th century has been itself dominated by men and posing gender bias by being 'interested in male offenders and generally dismissive of female offending' (Shen & Winlow, 2014, p.327). Thus this research contributes towards contemporary debates about women's experiences of imprisonment and in particular addresses the gap in empirical evidence on the post-Soviet women's experiences of imprisonment in Latvia.

Moreover, while the majority of research in relation to post-Soviet imprisonment has focused on more tangible forms of the Soviet legacy, such as distinct penal geographies or 'carceral collectivism' (Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2011; Piacentini & Pallot, 2014; Piacentini & Slade, 2015), this thesis, additionally, aims to explore the 'nontangible' Soviet legacy in terms of the values and the Soviet nostalgia, which is particularly pronounced among more senior prisoners and staff of Ilguciems Women's Prison (IWP).

My interest in exploring crime and criminal justice is deeply rooted in my personal history. I grew up in a working class family in one of the post-Soviet industrial cities in Latvia during the time when, similar to other post-Soviet countries, Latvia



underwent the complicated transitional period from a command to a market economy, which resulted in an unprecedented level of criminal activity and state-wide corruption. This triggered my interest towards exploring crime and criminality. I believe my passion and dedication to my research project have led to an original work that contributes to the discourse on penal developments within post-Soviet countries.

## **Thesis Framework**

Informed by cultural criminology perspective, this thesis aims to place crime and crime control in the context of culture, which implies that both the notion of crime and the institutions for crime control are cultural products, which should be ‘read in terms of the meanings they carry’ (Hayward & Young, 2004, p.259). This is essential for exploring the ideological rupture and understanding of how penalty developed within post-Soviet Latvia.

By situating criminality in the context of predominant ideologies and cultural dynamics, the deeper meaning of societal processes can be understood. As one of the main tasks of social scientists is to explain and interpret the dynamics and developments within society, it is vital to grasp the deeper meaning of the underlying forces that direct the major shifts of societal ethos. These shifts can emerge from a change in the political system or more hidden influences that transform society, such as membership of supranational organisations. Therefore, similar to other research projects, this research

aims at providing ‘explanations of how social relations are structured and maintained and how social change occurs’ (Matthews, 2014, p.207).

This research study can be compared to the well-known Russian nest doll – matryoshka,<sup>2</sup> which contains three layers. At the broadest macro-level the aim is to dwell on downwards constructions or how ideology (implicit or explicit) is used as a mechanism for social control. The wider environment is considered as the political, economic, and socio-cultural trajectories, which have influenced the development of the main penal strategies in Latvia. The meso level examines implications brought by the post-Soviet prison regulatory frameworks and physical conditions as well as how they are affecting the main control strategies. These strategies seem to emerge from the fusion of Soviet rationalised ‘carceral collectivism’ (spatial and cultural) and the neoliberal progressive stage system with embedded schemes of progression and earned privileges, which results in a hybrid system. The micro level contains the analysis of human interactions and relationships among prisoners and prison staff, which is in line with Crewe’s (2009) suggestion that prison researchers can provide a sociological snapshot of prison life that can be further interpreted within the broader policy context. Thus, as much as it is about understanding everyday life within a women’s prison, it is about stepping outside of it ‘to see the broader structural context these facilities were embedded in’ (Haney, 2015, p.248).

It is important to acknowledge that the collapse of the Soviet project was not just an economic transition, it was also an individual transition from the previously created

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<sup>2</sup> The use of the term ‘matryoshka’ can be seen as problematic as it has deeply ingrained gendered cultural assumptions embedded in it -encompassing and nurturing womanhood (see Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012). However, I am using this concept for its design features, which allow one to highlight the interconnectedness of all three levels (macro, meso and micro).

‘Homo sovieticus’ (Alexievich, 2016; Zinoviev, 1986) to ‘Homo consumericus’ (Saad, 2007). People were bound to change on both sides of the prison wall; thus one of the key questions of this research is how people and their relationships changed within the prison environment in response to shifts in a wider ideological framework. Thus, as much as it is about downwards constructions it is equally about upwards constructions (Hayward & Young, 2004) and how women in confined space make sense of conflicting ideological frameworks. The construction of meaning and power struggles within a women’s prison along with the pains of ‘carceral collectivism’ are embedded in this thesis framework and to some extent this research also extends to struggles, which transcend the prison walls.

## **Chapter Outline**

This thesis is divided into two parts – the first half of the thesis is composed of the key background literature, which conceptualises the two ideologically opposed ‘titans’ and their effects on penalty and imprisonment as well as the transitioning process within society that took place after the break down of the Soviet project. The second part of the thesis is based on exploring the ‘clash of the titans’ inside a Latvian women’s prison, which is presented through three different realms or lenses: the material (prison space), procedural (prison regime and regulations) and ideological (interpersonal relationships and their underpinning principles, systems and rationale). These three lenses are used in order to capture the meaning and highlight the complexity of the prison experience as well as establishing links to the broader context in which

prisons operate. Prisons and what happens inside them should be seen as a reflection of the state and the larger society (Jacobs, 1977), thus a prison as an institution cannot be divorced from the wider context of the state and its policies.

After providing a broad outline of this thesis in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 introduces both ‘titans’ or the neoliberal and Soviet projects and their underpinning characteristics. The particular focus is on how ideology creates a specific cultural climate, which in turn generates culture-specific implications for crime and crime control mechanisms. The main aim of this Chapter is to dwell on downwards constructions, namely ideology (implicit or explicit) as a mechanism for social control. Chapter 2 also acknowledges what disadvantages to society both projects have brought, and how they both use penalty and imprisonment for punishing those who do not ‘fit in’ to the system. In the Soviet socialist era, these were the dissidents and other political prisoners or the so-called ‘enemies of the state’, whereas under neoliberalism these are the poor and other socially undesirable elements (Bauman, 2000a; Wacquant, 1999; 2009) who fail to live up to the expectations of liquid modernity in which ‘change is the only permanence, and uncertainty the only certainty’ (Bauman, 2013, p.191). Despite these two seemingly opposed sets of ideologies, there are many shared features. This Chapter highlights their commonalities not only in terms of penalty and imprisonment, but also noting the shared ambition to construct a new social order in which greater equality and liberation were sought. However, in both cases this can be more apparent than real, although for different reasons. Thus, both ‘titans’ and their ideological underpinnings can be deemed vulnerable to in-depth investigations or discovering what lies beneath the realm of appearance.

Chapter 3 highlights what happened after the breakdown of Soviet hegemonic power and what it meant for the post-Soviet society to transition from a command economy to a market economy. The aim of this Chapter is to deconstruct the transition process in which a change of the dominant culture took place along with the process of reconfiguration of the political, social, and cultural order. While many Soviet people welcomed the breakdown of the Soviet project, in particular non-native Russian speaking populations, such as Latvians (Pabriks & Purs, 2001), for many Russian native speakers and those who were committed to the communist vision, this period brought a real ‘crisis of being’ as the world seemed to be irreversibly changing (Alexievich, 2016; Oushakine, 2009). This has been overlooked by many Western scholars and this Chapter depicts the ideological rupture, which meant the reconfiguration of human existence, accepted norms and values. Additionally, the birth of neoliberalism was accompanied by widespread violence and instability within the post-Soviet space. This Chapter also links the transition process to shifts in penal strategies, which when coupled with Latvia’s deeper integration in Europe, facilitated the emergence of the rights based approach towards imprisonment.

Next, Chapter 4 brings the ‘clash of the titans’ into the prison environment, but it starts by ‘writing the history of the present’ (Foucault, 1979, p.31) and mapping out the development of two distinct sets of carceral practices, namely ‘cellular confinement’ that is predominantly associated with Western society, and ‘carceral collectivism’, which has been the Soviet approach towards imprisonment. This is vital for interpreting current imprisonment practices in Latvia as they tend to be an inconsistent mix of both the Soviet legacy and the neoliberal agenda. Additionally, this Chapter introduces three different realms or lenses through which the prison experience can be conceptualised:

the material (prison space), procedural (prison regime and regulations) and ideological (interpersonal relationships and their underpinnings). These lenses are considered through two dimensions: the past and the presumed future via ‘Western’ penal trajectories, to which Latvia is politically committed.

Chapter 5 covers methodology and explains the conceptual frameworks used in the thesis. This study is based on an ethnographic approach, which entails sharing the everyday world and daily routines of prisoners and prison staff. The aim is to explore prisoner and staff lived experiences within the prison environment and this research draws on Wacquant’s (2002a, p.371) suggestion of getting ‘in and out of the belly of the beast’ in order to explain how the prison system can be viewed in a wider socio-political context.

After Chapter 5 I present the findings of the empirical research. Each of the following chapters – 6, 7 and 8 - examines intertwined struggles for power, control and agency, along with the pains of ‘carceral collectivism’ through each of the lenses conceptualised in the theory chapters (the material, procedural and ideological). Chapter 6 provides the material context to women’s imprisonment in Latvia. Prison space can be a vital determinant of how life in prison is organised and experienced by those who share the carceral space. This Chapter aims to explore how prison space is used as a control mechanism and how it can oppress and become a source of the pains of imprisonment or contrary to that serves as a means for achieving agency. Essentially, it highlights how prison’s physical environment can be seen as one of the most notable aspects of the Soviet legacy, which adds an additional layer to the collective pains of imprisonment and helps to maintain the attachment to Soviet times. At the same time, prison should not be viewed as a homogenous space, as there are also some special units

or places of ‘difference’. However, it seems that through the physical space, the tenuous link to the Soviet past is maintained preserving visual reminders and carrying onwards nostalgia for Soviet times.

Chapter 7 introduces the procedural context or how life within prison is socially organised and constrained. The focus is on how the prison regime is delivered, not only in terms of the prescribed regime and activities but also on the relational elements of imprisonment, namely how the regime is enforced through relationships and trust, which are equally important (Crewe *et al.*, 2014b). This chapter depicts the gradual regime change and highlights the intertwined struggles between attachment to ‘carceral collectivism’ and the increasing pressure for individualisation. While pressure might be mounting for individualisation there are many forms of collectivity and togetherness still experienced within a post-Soviet women’s prison.

Chapter 8 relates back to the ideological context and the ‘clash of the titans’, which goes beyond the material and procedural context. This Chapter in particular focuses on how both prisoners and prison staff negotiate and come to terms with contradictory ideologies and sets of values. The collapse of the Soviet project and its ideological defeat required a remake of society and this Chapter reveals the transformations at the micro level or how people and the relationships changed within the prison environment and beyond in response to shifts in a wider ideological framework. The Soviet way of life and ideology seems to have been driven to the most secluded and isolated places by the new neoliberal order and prisons tend to provide almost ideal places of refuge in which the nostalgia for the Soviet times and the opposition to the current order can be voiced the loudest.

All of the above empirical chapters highlight the ‘clash of the titans’ in relation to the applied theoretical lens. Although it should also be acknowledged that these lenses overlap and, at times, blend into each other as they form one living body of the ‘carceral beast’. Thus, it is a fine line between dismembering the ‘carceral beast’ or disentangling and separating different lenses and bringing those lenses together in order to capture the ‘carceral beast’ as one single living organism.

The concluding Chapter draws together the macro, meso, and micro levels and combines all three lenses: spatial, procedural and ideological in order to provide a more holistic view of the ‘clash of the titans’ that manifests itself in the post-Soviet women’s imprisonment. The ‘clash of the titans’ in action established three fundamental contestations, namely: ‘*individual vs collective*’; ‘*market techniques vs the monopoly of the state*’; and ‘*soft power vs hard power*’, which mark the transition process from the Soviet to the neoliberal order within the women’s prison.

In sum, this thesis explores how the Soviet legacy through space, procedures and ideology clashes within a seemingly neoliberal prison system. By and large, it can be argued that prisons in the post-Soviet context could be seen as strongholds of Soviet values and the last large-scale institutional battleground for the two ideologically opposed ‘titans’ in which the battle over human hearts and minds is nowhere near to ending.



## **Chapter 2 The ‘Clash of the Titans’: Ideological Underpinnings and (Un)intended Outcomes**

### **Introduction**

This Chapter conceptualises the two ideologically opposed ‘titans’, which are represented by the neoliberal and the Soviet projects, and their distinctive mechanisms of social control. The main aim of this Chapter is to dwell on downward constructions, namely ideology (implicit or explicit), as a mechanism for social control. In particular, the focus is on how ideology creates a specific cultural climate, which in turn generates culture-specific implications for crime and crime control mechanisms. The first two sections of this Chapter provide a brief overview of the two seemingly opposed sets of ideologies upheld respectively by the neoliberal and the Soviet projects, as well as their moral justifications. The last section of this Chapter draws on the similarities of both projects and their overall strategies for maximising benefits from the established system through penalty and incarceration. I refer to them as projects in order to highlight their ‘unfinished’ nature and ‘incompleteness’ that serves as a cover-up for undesirable outcomes and the associated harms in production. The Soviet and neoliberal projects have brought different kinds of harms to society and much of it relates to the moral inadequacy, which manifests itself ‘as an absence of accountability for the harms created by legal economic activity’ (Rawlinson, 2010, p.17).

There are some further conceptual clarifications required. The neoliberal project does not refer to a homogeneous set of practices and should instead be viewed as an analytical category that is connected to the promotion of a particular agenda through economic and public policies (Whyte & Wiegratz, 2016). Moreover, it is not linked to a

set territory or particular countries, which is useful for the purpose of mimicking the idea of the 'borderless neoliberal ethos' (Ong, 2006, p.148) and acknowledging the different types of 'local neoliberalisms' that have developed (Peck & Tickell, 2002). The Soviet project, unlike its neoliberal competitor, had more distinct boundaries and geographical constraints but similarly it should not be understood in monolithic terms.

In order to conceptualise the two ideologically opposed 'titans', it is useful to apply a cultural criminological framework, as it places 'crime and its control in the context of culture' (Hayward & Young, 2004, p.259). In this study it is essential to understand how crime and crime control were constructed and the purpose they served during the period of the Soviet times (or the era of socialism) and how this differs from the current neoliberal approach. The departure point is an acceptance of culture as a dynamic concept, which entails construction of meaning through dual vantage points - from the bottom by constructions upwards and the top by downwards constructions (Hayward & Young, 2004). Culture can be seen as a site of struggle in which opposite forces meet. It is a site where resistance is met by suppression and vice versa (Hall, 1998); thus, this ongoing process generates a vibrant movement and continuous social change. Although the traditional approach of cultural criminology, originating from North America, was to focus on specific subcultures and issues of meaning, European academics extended the focus around a concern to interpret power and structural considerations in late modern capitalism (Hayward, 2016). Therefore, in order to conceptualise the mechanisms of social control I will draw on both approaches and use both the construction of meaning within the Soviet and neoliberal projects as well as analysing how power operates within the two ideologically opposed regimes. This Chapter outlines more general characteristics of both projects, but the particularities of

the implementation and effects on women's imprisonment in Latvia will be discussed in following Chapters.

## **2.1 'Ins and Outs' of the Neoliberal Project**

The neoliberal project at the macro socio-political level sets conditions for the construction of social order that forms the context of culture. There might be no proof that behind the neoliberal Leviathan there is a cohesive strategy or a strategist in the background (Valverde, 2010), but it can be argued that in order to construct a social order around capital a continuous re-education was needed (Hall, 1998). One of the first and most important 'educational' features is the process of bringing 'all human action into the domain of the market' (Harvey, 2007, p.3). As suggested by Ong (2006, p.4) neoliberalism induce individuals to 'self-manage according to market principles of discipline, efficiency, and competitiveness'. The market consequently becomes the main tool for 'responsibilisation' and social control as it provides a specific set of values and constraints, which shape the continuous process of re-education. It can be argued that, currently, Western society is so well re-educated that it is easier for it to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism or, similarly, the end of capitalism is seen as the end of the world (Fisher, 2009; Jameson, 2003; Žižek, 2011).

At the macro level the neoliberal political-economic project provides for state actors an operating framework or 'ideological software' (Peck & Tickell, 2002) through which certain aspects of interest are promoted, such as global market economy, free-trade and capital movement, and business-friendly environment (Campbell, 2010). The

market becomes an independent actor and, as Bauman (2013, p.189) has pointed out, the progressive separation and divorce of power from politics that takes place result in power that is increasingly free from political control, and ‘politics increasingly suffering a deficit of power’ (see also Bauman, 2011). Thus, a state’s political and economic capacity is challenged and controlled by market forces and corporate power, which advocate fewer regulations and state non-intervention policies (Crouch, 2011). One of the most visible market influences within public governance is placement of public institutions under the rules of a business model and the application of the ‘managerial’ ethos. Governments become customers by outsourcing many of their services to privately owned companies in order to provide adaptive, efficient and cost effective service provisions (Crouch, 2011; Mazerolle, Rynne & McPhedran, 2018). By definition capitalism is about making profit and when this kind of mind-set or principle is applied to the public sector certain issues arise, particularly, in relation to legitimacy and fairness, as crime control can be turned into a profitable business model (Fitzgibbon & Lea, 2018) that benefits national and global businesses (Haney, 2010).

The question of legitimacy should be raised especially regarding its implications for the criminal justice system. The classical notion of a state’s capacity to maintain domestic order is based on its ability to sanction those who break the law and, as argued by Max Weber (1946), the state can claim the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force. The state possesses the means and resources for enforcing the monopoly of legitimate violence. The Weberian state monopoly of the use of physical force coupled with the notion of a social contract, traditionally explained people’s willingness to surrender some of their freedoms in order to obtain the state’s protection, and the citizen expectations have further expanded with the emergence of the welfare state

(Carlen & Worrall, 2004). The business model application of contracting out services within the criminal justice system creates the 'security- industrial complex' (Fitzgibbon & Lea, 2018, p.549), which is contrary to those classical notions. Wacquant (2010, p.197) has argued that prisons are no longer perceived as 'a technical implement for law enforcement, but as a core political capacity whose selective and aggressive deployment in the lower regions of social space violates the ideals of democratic citizenship'. Bauman (2000a, p.205) has suggested that a significant shift in the social contract has taken place, moving away from a traditional approach that required the exchange of individual liberties for collective economic security, and towards 'a trade-off of collective security in exchange for the maximization of individual choice, which, in turn, focused by the political process upon the problem of crime and its control gives rise to a logic of exclusion and fortification'.

Moreover, it seems that a two-tier 'justice' system is being created. It can be argued that under the new market-oriented regime, lawlessness for the rich has been guaranteed (Currie, 1997) with the general notion being that law and order is for the poor, but the global rich can enjoy advantages because 'order is local, while the elite and the free-market laws it obeys are translocal' (Bauman, 2000a, p.219). The new order also affects both genders differently, as women tend to be place-bound 'whereas businessmen are constituted as free-floating' actors (Mitchell, 2016, p.122). Thus, neoliberal policies result in protecting patriarchy and the interests of capital. By empowering police and military, the rich and powerful safeguard their security (Harvey, 2007). Wacquant (2009, p.43) has established an argument of a 'centaur state', which is guided by a liberal head regarding market economy and inequalities that are generated by it with an authoritarian body that is 'brutally paternalistic and punitive downstream,

when it comes to coping with their consequences on a daily level'. Thus, crime and crime control should be seen as cultural products, which are closely linked with the leading ideologies of the time that need to be 'read in terms of the meanings they carry' (Hayward & Young, 2004, p.259).

The neoliberal project turns crime control into a business model or an industry that replaces those industries that have been in decline or vanished (Christie, 2000). Huling (2002) argues that prisons are becoming a 'growth industry' in rural areas where building a new prison provides a new lifeline for locals and communities, which have suffered from a considerable decline in farming, manufacturing and other production industries (see also Lotke, 1996). Changes in rural communities and global production trends lead people to discover the great opportunity that crime control provides, as it has the potential to become an endless industry where 'there is no lack of raw material; crime seems to be in endless supply' (Christie, 2000, p.13). This seems a perfect business model for those who are actively engaged in crime control, but imprisonment is a costly strategy for taxpayers (Simon, 2014) or as, suggested by Fukuyama (1996, p.11), prisoner rates constitute 'a direct tax imposed by the breakdown of trust in society'.

Those in favour of this kind of business model undoubtedly underline benefits by 'using [the] language of cost-savings and effectiveness' (Liebling & Crewe, 2013, p.295). By 'contracting out' distinct sets of functions such as ancillary services and prison management governments can save money as, ostensibly, privately run prisons can be more efficient due to the fact that with competition the cheapest service provider would be awarded the contract. However, big businesses do not like competition and the 'market itself is dominated by a small handful of multinational corporations or

conglomerates for whom various mechanisms might be available to limit competition’ (Cavadino & Dignan, 2006, p.66). This is especially reflected within the criminal justice system where a few large companies dominate the field, which supports Klein’s (2007, p.87) argument that a ‘huge transfer of wealth from public to private hands’ takes place. Thus, for corporations this can be a great opportunity for profit and a lucrative business, which includes building the facilities, providing health care, food services, and security technologies (Christie, 2000, Haney, 2010).

Ritzer (2004) suggests that a process of the McDonaldization of criminal justice takes place, which adheres to the managerial ethos and so-called three E’s – economy, efficiency, and effectiveness. On the one hand, it might seem that institutions become more rational and bureaucratic in a Weberian sense ‘more efficient, calculable, predictable, and controlling over people (often by nonhuman technologies)’ (Bohm, 2006, p.127), but on the other hand, there are certain costs and dangers, such as poor quality of work and a focus on quantification, dehumanising and mind-numbing work routines, which Ritzer (2004) describes as the ‘irrationality of rationality’. The process of McDonaldization of criminal justice supports the broader managerial agenda and focus on performance targets where employees are expected to achieve more, but with fewer resources.

The McDonaldization of criminal justice was conceptualised earlier in the 90s by Feeley and Simon (1992, p.449) who suggested that moving from ‘old’ to ‘new penology’ entails shifting away from concerns of ‘punishing individuals to managing aggregates of dangerous groups’. This leads to penal institutions functioning as a means of discarding socially undesirable elements and controlling the poor (Bauman, 2000a; Wacquant, 1999; 2009) or so-called ‘risky populations’ (Hannah-Moffat, 2013), which

are removed from the social body and kept temporarily or permanently in isolation (Young, 1999a). However, this group of 'excluded' people, who all share the same struggle of 'living up to the norm' (Bauman, 2000a, p.207), distracts attention from the crimes of the powerful and actively construct 'particular images of criminality' (Sim, 2006, p.101). Moreover, as argued by Ruggiero (2012) the absence from markets is punished, rather than people's criminal capacity (see also Harcourt, 2010). Thus, due to the lack of resources people can be excluded and exclusion is something done to people. They have been excluded 'because 'people like them' did not fit an order of someone else's, not of their own, choice' (Bauman, 2000a, p.207).

Furthermore, it is not only the working class experiencing the authoritarian body of the neoliberal project. A large proportion of the middle class is also subjected to precarious labour, risks of unemployment and insecurity, which they need to manage and overcome (Lea & Hallsworth, 2012). Campbell has noted that the neoliberal state's relationship to the middle and upper classes can equate to 'debtor state' (Campbell, 2010). The lending policies have created the indebted society at multiple levels: individual/household, business/corporate, and state/public, which all contribute towards economic insecurity (Medoff & Harless, 1996). This situation constrains and 'imprisons' people in certain ways of life that results in anxiety, social and mental insecurities (Wacquant, 2009). Bourdieu refers to 'the structural violence of unemployment', which is 'placed under the banner of individual freedom' (Bourdieu, 1998, p.98). This profound sense of insecurity and uncertainty not only individualises and strips away a sense of solidarity but also exposes the most vulnerable strata to a new discipline of labour (Wacquant, 2009) and culture of control (Bierie, 2013), which



implies that controlling less fortunate citizens has become one of the characteristics of liberal market oriented societies.

## 2.2 In the Soviet Grip

*'Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.'*

(Marx and Engels, cited in Anker, 2012, p.142)

The proactive ideological stances promoted by Marx and Engels inspired intellectuals and labour masses across the globe, but their ideas were especially prominent among those who tried to challenge the traditional hegemonic power relationships between the social classes. Marx indeed succeeded in fulfilling his ambitions not only to theorise about the world but also to change it or, as West (1991) suggests, Marx, by taking the radical historicist approach, managed to bring social issues and philosophical thinking within history and, as such, changed the world. However, there were certain favourable socio-cultural conditions that might have enabled this to happen. Ostensibly some populations can be seen as more prone to embrace Marxist ideas. The communist dream was more likely to be upheld by the population that subordinates individual needs to community (Engel, 2004) or that is accustomed to the harsh rule of aristocrats and has tolerated tyranny in the past (Bergman, 1998). To some extent the Soviet project can be seen as a logical continuation of Russian culture and history, which is rooted within autocracy and rule by the few (Poe, 2003). In general, Russian history can be described as 'very much the

story of consciousness – theories and values, hopes and lies’ (Daniels, 1993, cited in Enteen, 1995, p.321-322).

Marxism provided an alternative vision of how society should be governed. The assumption was that after breaking away from capitalism through the proletarian revolution, a classless society would be created, which is the universal fulfilment of humankind. It was aimed at transforming social relationships and empowering those who have been neglected and exploited by the process of industrialisation and the capitalist system. Thus, it was meant to be a revolution from below but the all-powerful leaders quickly turned it into ‘the revolution from above’ with five year plans and tight control of all aspects of life of the Soviet people (Enteen, 1995). The revolution was meant to liberate people - to make them lose their chains - but, in fact, it seems that the chains tightened up. The Soviet leaders sought to regulate not only economy and politics, but also the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the people, essentially defining the kind of human being one should aspire to be (Bergman, 1998).

The Soviet Project, similar to any other political establishment, went through different stages of development and through difficult internal and external battles over the vision of the future. However, it is worth remembering that history is written by the victors and the Soviet case is no exception, which serves as a confirmation of Marx and Engels’ argument that:

‘the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production.’  
(Marx & Engels, 1976, p.59)

This also highlights a struggle over cultural power via dominance and subordination, ‘which is an intrinsic feature of cultural relations’ (Hall, 1998, p.447), in which the dominant culture can ‘reconfigure the political, social, and cultural order’ (Engel, 2004, p.2) and ‘set the rules for inclusion in, and exclusion from’ the community (Beyler, Kojevnikov & Wang, 2005, p.23-24). Despotic leaders, such as Stalin (see Amis, 2002; Poe, 2003), determined the history and future development of the Soviet project until it officially ceased to exist. Nevertheless, the Soviet legacy is continuous and inseparable from the current developments within the post-Soviet space (see Haney, 2010; Krupnyk, 2018; Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012, Pallot, 2005; Piacentini, 2004a; 2004b), and for this reason, it is vital to explore deeper into promoted values and what kind of society the Soviet project envisaged.

The utopian vision of constructing an abstract, idealised Soviet society in reality was based on a top down approach in which the all-powerful state and its leaders would be in charge of constructing and carving out the perfect society. The traditional values and society was destroyed and replaced by a new breed of Soviet women and men. Furthermore, the aim was to establish a religion-free public arena so a fierce attack on religion took place. This was necessary in order to oppress any alternative power that could be located outside of the control of the Communist Party. The coexistence of two ‘religions’ was not favoured and one had to perish (Poe, 2003). The assumption was that people would be steered towards embracing the rational scientific worldview that ultimately would ‘unseat the power of religion’ (Kojevnikov, 2008, p.118).

The Soviet people became separated from everything that gave meaning to life such as religion, nationality and family (Amis, 2002; Borisov, 1975; Shafarevich, 1980). Despite this, there was an expectation that people would fight for and defend the

‘general cause’ by abandoning the corrupt capitalist ideas and make sustained sacrifices to build communism together. But as Dostoyevsky envisaged half a century prior to the Russian revolution, there are certain shortcomings if working for the ‘common good’:

‘No, I have but one life, I have no wish to wait for the ‘common weal’. I wish to live myself, otherwise it would be better not to exist at all. I have no desire to neglect a starving mother, and clutch the money I have by me, on the pretext that some day or other everybody will be happy. As some of them say, I contribute my stone towards the building-up of universal happiness, and that must be enough to set my mind at ease. Ha, ha!... As I have but a certain time to live, I intend to have my share of happiness forthwith. After all, I am only so much atheistical vermin, nothing more.’ (Dostoyevsky, 1997, p.208)

This extended quote reveals many of the problems encountered by the Soviet system as individuals were expected to sacrifice their family ties, comfort and personal benefits for the future common good. However, it is also worth remembering that communism was nothing but an idea and the Bolsheviks were the first to embrace this Marxist utopian vision. It did not exist in any other state, unlike its rival capitalism (Poe, 2003). Thus, the Soviet project can be seen as a social experiment on an unprecedented scale, which attempted to mould people into unconditional objects that function according to the Marxist-Leninist doctrines. To some extent the Soviet project succeeded in creating a society that was different to the Western capitalistic world, but this came at the cost of freedoms of all Soviet people. The ‘iron curtain’ or the isolationist policy, in combination with propaganda and coercive strategies, ensured the survival of the all-oppressive ‘union’ for many decades. The harshest penalties were for treason or any other action that could be deemed as against the interests of the state and its power. As Solzhenitsyn (2007, xi) has suggested, the Soviet system survived for so long ‘not because there has not been any struggle against it from inside, not because people

docilely surrendered to it, but because it is inhumanely strong, in a way as yet unimaginable to the West’.

The Soviet state enforced control over all aspects of life. Socialism was not just about dealing with economic and political issues in a particular way, it managed to embrace ‘almost every aspect of human existence’ (Shafarevich, 1975a, p.31). Firstly, politics was taken care of as there was just one party to vote for and the election results were predictable. Secondly, the state, via a centralised command economy, was in direct control of all production and distribution. This proved to be an advantage after a devastating loss of 20 million lives during World War II (Harrison, 2011), but in the long term, the centralised command economy had weaknesses and inefficiencies that led to scarce availability of consumer goods and services (Engel, 2004). However, as consumerism was attributed to capitalism, ideologically, there was nothing wrong with limiting or rationing available consumer goods and services. It was a way through which the ‘sameness’ of people could be enforced and people’s desires kept under control. Thirdly, some ‘softer’ measures such as censorship and propaganda ensured that only the ‘right’ messages were disseminated and embedded within the hearts and minds of the people.

Initially political propaganda via posters were also useful for a semi-literate population as they could read them by relying on their habits of seeing and interpreting traditionally rich visual displays of the Russian autocracy and the Orthodox Church (Bonnell, 1997). A separate branch of art - socialist realism even developed just to glorify and depict communist values. In the end both art and literature were used as political and ideological instruments (Bullitt, 1976). But those Soviet citizens who were not compelled by the ‘softer’ measures required a harsher ‘encouragement’. The number

of penal colonies rose just a year after Russia's revolutionaries came to power (Applebaum, 2003). This was the beginning of the gulag system, which was later embraced by Stalin (Poe, 2003). The gulag became an integral part of the Soviet system and it began to signify the Soviet repressive system and slave labour. In fact, there were different types of penal colonies: 'labour camps, punishment camps, criminal and political camps, women's camps, children's camps, transit camps' (Applebaum, 2003, p.3).<sup>3</sup> Initially, those camps served the purpose of purging class enemies in the name of creating the world's first socialist society, but later hidden motivations for individual arrest came to the fore - which were greed and vengefulness (Solzhenitsyn, 1974). Overall, the treatment of prisoners within those camps was equally harsh regardless of gender as:

'women were subjected to the same horrors in the camps as men; they had the same rations, endured the same living conditions, suffered from the same deficits of clothing to protect them against Siberian winters and unheated barracks, and they were held in the same camps.'  
(Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012, p.5)

Due to the Soviet executed mass deportations across the Soviet project<sup>4</sup> (see Applebaum, 2003; Krupnyk, 2019; Kurvet-Käosaar, 2018) and political prosecutions that involved punishing the entire families (including children), the

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<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of this thesis, all different kinds of penal institutions will not be differentiated, but what needs to be pointed out is that in the territory of Latvia, there was established only one gulag camp with a capacity of 1500 inmates, which was meant for disabled prisoners. Its location was in Ogre, but due to the general amnesty issued after the death of Stalin in 1953, it was shut down (Krūmiņš & Pokšāns, 1996). In general, prisoners from the territory of Latvia were sent to other parts of the Soviet project either to meet the required 'prisoner quota' by the central Soviet apparatus or due to the 'in exile' policies applied to the political prisoners.

<sup>4</sup> Soviets executed two mass deportations from the territory of Latvia. The first mass deportation from Latvia took place during the night of 14<sup>th</sup> of June 1941, when 15 443 people, mainly the Latvian elite, were exiled without any legal grounds. The second mass deportation from Latvia took place on March 25, 1949, when 42 322 people were subjected to deportations and the repressive regime and sent to Siberia (Museum of the Occupation of Latvia, 2019).

percentage of women among prisoners was high - women ranged from 13% to 30% of the total amount of prisoners between the late 1930s and early 50s (Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012).

In addition, the rivalry between the Soviets and the West not only provided a constant drive towards greater achievements in science and military armament but also installed a binary division between 'us' and 'them'. However, it was not just an external division - internally the Soviet people lived under a constant threat of becoming the enemy of the state. The terror effectively broke ties of friendship and families, but it was not a perversion of the system, it was 'the natural consequence of attempting to introduce a type of society that is far removed from the values and expectations of its members' (Montaner, 2006, p.64). Indiscriminate punishment also ensured that nobody felt secure and everyone had to obey. So-called 'state enemies' were tried under Article 58 of the Soviet Penal Code, which provided a blank cover for prosecution, and as told by Solzhenitsyn (1974, p.60) 'in all truth, there is no step, thought, action, or lack of action under the heavens, which could not be punished by the heavy hand of Article 58'. Thus, each action or lack of action could be interpreted as a proof of disloyalty and anyone even remotely connected with posing a threat to the Soviet system could be prosecuted under it. Solzhenitsyn also pointed out that the Code of Soviet law was not accessible to the public and your interest in seeing it could be interpreted as a preparation to commit a crime or trying to cover up. Only when the Code was outdated was it released for general circulation (Solzhenitsyn, 1974).

Of course, it is worth remembering that 'crime by definition was expected to die out, to disappear, under socialism and communism' (Butler, 1992, p.146). Those who came to power after the revolution believed that they would be able to address the root

causes of crime by establishing an ideal system in which ‘the putative bases of criminal behavior - class conflict and exploitation - would disappear’ (Slade & Light, 2015, p.148). Little did they envisage that the very existence of the Soviet project would depend on repressive and coercive mechanisms, such as prisons and forced labour camps. Crime and imprisonment in the Soviet project became a controversial and secretive issue. In fact, crime statistics from the first decade of establishment of the Soviet Union were classified as a state secret and the first official crime statistics were released only in late 1990 (Butler, 1992).

As criminality continued to persist, it was not only made into a state secret,<sup>5</sup> but also turned into an economical solution for maintaining the command economy. Penal institutions had played a central role within the Soviet project; by early 1950s labour camps reached the peak and contributed to the production of ‘a third of the country’s gold, much of its coal and timber, and a great deal of almost everything else’ (Applebaum, 2003, p.4). Prison labour served multiple other functions apart from providing substantial contributions to a centrally planned economy. It was a way of providing a reliable workforce to the most remote and inhospitable regions. There was also a reformatory value to work (Piacentini, 2004b) (this will be further developed in Chapter 4).

In addition, this practice or so-called ‘in exile’ imprisonment displaced ‘political opposition, criminality and social deviancy to the peripheries’ (Piacentini & Pallot, 2014, p.22), which immobilized and segregated any real or perceived opposition to the

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<sup>5</sup> No visual evidence was gathered; the access to institutions was forbidden and the Soviet camps were never filmed, which meant there is little understanding of what happened inside (Applebaum, 2003).



Soviet project.<sup>6</sup> There was no place for a critique of the Soviet system. Failings of the system were silenced and pronounced as state secrets. Similarly people were kept silent and oppressed as they knew well the consequences of speaking out against the Communist party policies. The Soviet system ‘inhibited the development of any form of pluralism’ (Ciobanu, 2009, p.315) and this monolithic approach lead to regression and oppression instead of intended emancipation and liberation.

## **2.3 The Moral Quandary: from Difference to Sameness**

In essence, both the neoliberal and the Soviet projects claimed to better people’s lives, to bring empowerment and equal opportunities to all. The language indeed might have been that of inclusion and liberation but the day-to-day reality was (and still is) far from the vocal claims. In their own ways, both projects turned out to be destructive and oppressive as they both belong to all-encompassing systems that inhibit pluralism and possess an inherent expansionary logic. The Soviet totalitarian system precluded ‘the development of any form of pluralism’ (Ciobanu, 2009, p.315) and it did not miss an opportunity to expand the physical boundaries of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics<sup>7</sup> or provide support to the socialist ‘friendly’ nations, as the future of mankind was deemed to be socialism (Shafarevich, 1975a). Similarly, for neoliberalism the market becomes the universal law governing social existence (Somek, 2011) and

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<sup>6</sup> The practice of immobilisation of the political opposition predates the Soviet Union. Peter the Great used this approach for obtaining labour for construction projects (Piacentini, 2004a). In the 18th century, ‘in exile’ imprisonment was introduced as a method of punishment also in the current territory of Latvia, just like other types of punishments, which operated in the Russian Empire (Krūmiņš & Pokšāns, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> The Soviet expansion after the Second World War included many of the Central Asian and Eastern European countries, among those, Latvia.

this social continuum requires a constant market expansion in order to generate economic growth and profit (Harvey, 2007). Market actors have colonised the neoliberal states and ‘turned state authority to the project of expanding markets and increasing profits at the expense of subaltern groups’ (Piven, 2010, p.111). People might be presented with apparent choices, opportunities and freedoms but the market actors are the ultimate governors.

The disintegration of the Soviet project seemed to be a sweeping victory for capitalism and a new colonising opportunity for market actors, but at the same time the breakdown of the Soviet project exposed the darker side and pathologies of capitalism, such as the possibilities of unlimited profit acquisition and the lack of moral basis of the free market (Rawlinson, 2010). In general, since the demise of the Soviet project, the concern is that the victorious neoliberal project is allowed to operate with impunity and almost without constraints (Hobsbawm, 1995). The moments of crisis are being particularly exploited with little moral regards to human casualties as the sole focus is on making profits (Klein, 2007; Loewenstein, 2015). The internationalisation of markets also contributes to a situation in which markets become ‘immune to any other moral perspective other than profit’ (Hobbs, 1994, p.459). Wacquant (2010, p.218) has suggested that neoliberalism as a transnational political project creates the bureaucratic field that is ‘profoundly injurious to democratic ideals’. Needless to say, the Soviet project would not fare any better regarding moral standings due to the oppression of free thought during ‘the decades of falsehood’, which demanded ‘continuous and active participation in the general, conscious *lie*’ (Solzhenitsyn, 1975, p.24, emphasis in original). Thus, both systems are vulnerable to in-depth investigations or ‘getting behind the realm of appearance’ and this vulnerability should not be attributed only to the

neoliberal project (see Harvey, 2007), but both systems. It ought to be a clash of two distinct ideologies that guided political actors and shaped societies within the neoliberal and the Soviet projects, but, in fact, they share many common features.

It can be argued that both projects strive to construct a new social order by generating a potent belief (Bourdieu, 1998). The neoliberal project chose the ‘free trade faith’, which requires ‘the lifting of the administrative or political barriers that could hinder the owners of capital in their purely individual pursuit of maximum individual profit’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.100). As the name of the ‘faith’ indicates, it is the market that plays a central role and governments are left with a secondary and supporting role for individual ‘marketisation’. Harvey (2018) has pointed out that states under neoliberalism have moved from supporting their citizens to prioritising and supporting capital; in fact, the taxpayers’ money can be used for subsidising the corporate businesses and their operations. In contrast, the Soviet project chose to avoid the ‘market ways of life’ (West, 1991) and embraced a belief in a ‘stated owned collectivism’, which was achieved by the abolition of private property and private means of production. This was aimed at emancipating workers and promoting self-realisation of the individual in the community along with avoiding reducing human relationships to money-exchange relationships and dehumanising effects that such kind of relationships leave on people (West, 1991). It was meant to open new doors to lower-class women, as it was ‘sought to eliminate the political, social, and gender hierarchies that relegated them to the lowest status’ (Engel, 2004, p.142). However, those were Marx’s theoretical constructs, which the Soviet leaders’ chose to implement through a totalitarian regime and means of coercion, which was far from intended liberation. Sakharov claimed that Marxism-Leninism was transformed by the Soviet regime into

the ‘ideology of a party-state totalitarianism’ (Sakharov, 1978, cited in Bergman, 1998, p.253).

Although the language for both projects might have been that of equality and liberation, those aspirations were somewhat more apparent than real. The Soviet project intended to enhance the sameness - the symbolic ‘brotherhood’ of workers achieving free and equal society. Women were encouraged to break out of domesticity as ‘petty housework crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades’ women (Lenin, 1938, cited in Engel, 2004, p.141). The assumption was that by liberating women ‘to exchange their domestic and sexual services for men’s financial support, women would encounter men as equals’ (Engel, 2004, p.142). Moreover, it was not just about economic liberation, but also emotional; as one of the leading Bolshevik feminists Kollontai not only suggested ‘free love’, but also a creation of the ‘great labouring family’ that would be superior to ‘ties to relatives’ (Kollontai, 1920, cited in Clements, 1997, p.227). In addition to that, certain gender pains were mitigated, such as the right to abortion<sup>8</sup> and divorce, the protection of the rights of children born out of wedlock and equal education opportunities for all. Under the Family Code introduced in 1918 women’s and men’s status were equalised, marriages were removed from the hands of the church it also ‘allowed a marrying couple to choose either the husband’s or wife’s surname’ (Engel, 2004, p.142).

However, gender hierarchy did not just disappear. Revolutionary iconography consistently portrayed heroic workers as males (Bonnell, 1997) and women rarely figured as ‘symbols of the socialist movement’; males were presented as ‘the liberator[s]

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<sup>8</sup> The Soviets were the first in the world to legalise abortion in 1920 (Engel, 2004).

of the world, breaking chains and crowns' (Engel, 2004, p.140). As suggested by Engel (2017, p.199) 'in revolutionary iconography, the woman worker occupied the margins, not the centre, of the new civic order'. Similar observations were made by Solzhenitsyn about being a woman under the Soviet system, which frequently left them behind the scenes to perform the hardest manual labour 'since the men moved onto machines or into administration' (Solzhenitsyn, 1975, p.14). Moreover, women were expected not only to participate in a full-time wage labour, but also take responsibility of house chores and child-rearing, which was a double burden for women under socialism (Pallot & Katz, 2017). As suggested by Žilinskienė (2018, p.319), the Soviet ideal women had to combine all three roles: 'a worker, a wife and a mother', which essentially meant that women in addition to work had to fulfil the traditional cultural expectations. Despite promising equality, a tiny elite (predominantly male) ruled the entire Soviet project with unrestricted licence, as the survival of the project was dependent on the use of force (Bergman, 1998). Therefore, the practice of 'Marxism' had turned out to be far from classless and far from just (Poe, 2003). On multiple levels this confirmed Orwell's criticism of socialist 'equality' in which some turned out to be more equal than others.<sup>9</sup>

Similar criticisms can be applied to the neoliberal project. Although it might seem that the neoliberal project promotes equality, individual freedoms, cultural heterogeneity and difference, all those values are rather linked to consumerism and 'commodification of culture' (Harvey, 2001) instead of moral commitments to equality and justice. Neoliberalism in the global context reinforces patriarchal relationships of power and social norms subsuming women to become protective mothers 'who will

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<sup>9</sup> The well-known phrase from Orwell's (1987, p.104) novel *Animal farm*: 'all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others'.

translate any gains from the market into the means for household survival, and will be prepared to make unlimited personal sacrifices to provide the household with a safety net against the ravages of neoliberal macroeconomic policies' (Cornwall, Gideon & Wilson, 2008, p.5). As suggested by Arruzza *et al.* (2019) the capitalist system is a wellspring of gender oppression, where women's labour (both paid and unpaid) is undervalued. Fraser (2013, p.9) highlights the deeply rooted androcentrism of capitalism and the 'entire panoply of structures and practices that prevent women from participating on a par with men in social life'. Molyneux (2006, p.425) also suggests that neoliberal economic reforms in developing countries have resulted in 're-traditionalising gendered roles and responsibilities'. Thus, both projects have produced some emancipatory advancement, but overall they have failed to deliver the officially promoted ambition of gender equality.

It can be argued that both projects resort to penal institutions for punishing those who do not 'fit in' the system and for absorbing threats to the established system (see Pabjan, 2009). Thus, penal institutions become sites in which many of those who do not fit in the dominant culture end up spending their lives. While in the Soviet project these were the dissidents and other political prisoners who allegedly committed 'crimes against the state' (Solzhenitsyn, 1974, p.60), in the neoliberal project penal institutions were directed at the poor and marginalised sections of the community (Bauman, 2000a; 2013; Wacquant, 1999; 2009). Moreover, both projects have attempted to benefit from imprisonment. The Soviet project used prison labour in order to obtain natural resources, build infrastructure and communities in the most remote and hostile areas. Applebaum (2003) refers to it as 'slave labour', which played a fundamental role in the Soviet economy and, consequently, penal institutions 'became central in the lives of many

families' (Katz & Pallot, 2018, p.381). Whereas the neoliberal project achieves economic benefits from imprisonment by injecting private interests into managing socially undesirable 'elements' (Christie, 2000) and building a 'prison industrial complex' (Gilmore, 2007; Lotke, 1996). Essentially, in both cases penal institutions become profit making machineries and an essential tool for social control. Nevertheless, the dehumanising experience of the Soviet imprisonment might not be reflected to the same extent within the neoliberal approach.

But one of the most compelling pieces of evidence in support of the argument that both projects share many similarities or rather lead to similar outcomes is the experience of the post-Soviet countries, in which people came to realise that the freedom and better life that they envisaged under the neoliberal project are painstakingly similar to what they tried to escape. The new capitalist consumer culture offers a wide range of products and services, and while many products and services become available, people struggle to cover their basic needs, which limits the newly acquired 'freedom' (Alexievich, 2016). However, despite some striking similarities, the most notable difference that ostensibly destroyed the Soviet project was the lack of adaptation to human nature. The Soviet project enforced artificial collectivism, abstract universal altruism and illusory collective solidarity (Montaner, 2006), whereas the neoliberal project places the ethos on competitiveness (Amable, 2011) and individual self-interests (Klein, 2007; Whitehead & Crawshaw, 2013). The socialist 'grand project' turned out to be simply incompatible with more selfish, individualistic, and corrupt desires of the human being. Both raw capitalism and socialism have failed (Harvey, 2007). The quest for a new political system should not stop, but as Peck (2010, p.109) suggests currently neoliberalism may have entered its zombie phase as 'the brain has

apparently long since ceased functioning, but the limbs are still moving, and many of the defensive reflexes seem to be working too’.

In sum, both projects have relied upon all-encompassing systems with tailored social control mechanisms, which adhered to their ideological imperatives. The market was placed at the heart of the neoliberal project, whereas the Soviets opted for the all-powerful state apparatus. Thus, while the Soviet project was based on an enormous concentration of political power, which could not be easily overthrown from below, the neoliberal project operates on the premise of the separation and divorce of power from politics (Bauman, 2013), which also results in difficulty locating the source of power and confronting it if necessary. Consequently, both systems tend to result in rendering the vast majority of their inhabitants ‘docile’ and incapable of leading resistance. In addition, in both cases, a well-equipped penal apparatus manages not only to address the issue of crime, but also serves as a mechanism for absorbing threats to the established system, as well as discarding those who do not fit in the dominant culture.

The two titans stand separate only in ideology. The history of a country can reveal the intricate interplay and struggle between the two opposed ideological forces, which use the countries as their battle grounds. The case of Latvia is one instance of this struggle, as it will be discussed thereupon.



## **Chapter 3 The Post-Soviet Space and the Reconstitution of Social Order: the Case Study of Latvia**

### **Introduction**

The end of the 80's and the early 90's provided a unique turning point in European history – the fall of the Berlin Wall, which led to German unification, and the collapse of the Soviet project resulted in emerging nation states. It might have seemed ‘the end of history’ (Fukuyama, 1989) but the universalisation of Western liberal democracy proved to be more challenging than anticipated. Just as predicted by Solzhenitsyn (1975) the transition process from silence to free speech was just as difficult, slow and painful as the oppression itself.<sup>10</sup> The breakdown of the Soviet hegemonic power resulted in widespread violence and instability within the post-Soviet space. Violence became the currency of the new order - ‘the real capitalism came with blood’ (Alexievich, 2016, p.59) as all orders of domination entail force and violence (Giddens, 1992).

The aim of this Chapter is twofold: firstly, to deconstruct the transition process in which a change of the dominant culture took place along with the process of reconfiguration of the political, social, and cultural order and, secondly, to explore how the Latvian penal system adapted and positioned itself in a wider socio-political context of neoliberalism. The first section of this Chapter focuses on the transition process from socialism to a market economy and the construction of a new social order based around

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<sup>10</sup> Similar suggestions were made by Dahrendorf (Dahrendorf, cited in Tolokonnikova & Žižek, 2014, p.36) ‘the road to new prosperity will lead through a “valley of tears”: with the breakdown of socialism we cannot pass directly to the abundance of a market economy - the limited, but real, socialist welfare and security systems will first have to be dismantled, and these initial steps will inevitably be painful’.

capital. However, the Soviet people were neither prepared for the freedom of consumption nor aware that the outcome of this would entail the rehabilitation of bourgeois existence (Alexievich, 2016). The second section succinctly highlights the individual transition that took place or the so-called transition from ‘Homo sovieticus’ (Alexievich, 2016; Zinoviev, 1986) to ‘Homo consumericus’ (Saad, 2007), which implied embracing the new individual freedoms and consumer culture (see Eglitis, 2011). Section three outlines Latvia’s ‘neoliberal spectrum’. This is best illustrated by the analysis of responses to the global economic crisis during the late 2000’s, which was referred as ‘Latvia’s neoliberal madness’ (Hudson & Sommers, 2010). This serves to highlight the trajectory of Latvia’s development and its embeddedness in neoliberal policies. The last section provides an overview of how the transition process affected penalty and women within the criminal justice system. Women can be deemed as a ‘particular’ subject within the criminal justice system, as their experiences tend to correspond to culturally embedded gender specific presumptions.

### **3.1 The Transition Process from a Socialist State to a Market Economy**

The collapse of the Soviet project<sup>11</sup> in the early 90’s fulfilled many people’s dreams by bringing long awaited freedom, which was desired by all those who for decades had experienced oppression and marginalisation. This was anticipated by Shafarevich (1975b), a well-established Russian scientist and dissident, who highlighted

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<sup>11</sup> Much of the literature discussed relates to the Soviet people in the broadest sense of all those who lived under the socialist system and its hegemonic power, which was experienced in various degrees by those associated to the vast Soviet project stretching from Siberia’s vast taiga to Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Essentially many countries after the breakdown of the Soviet project experienced similar struggles, especially the three Baltic countries (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia).

the oppression of all those smaller non-native Russian speaking populations, which, as envisaged by Dibb (1988, p.36), later formed the ‘explosive Soviet periphery’. Latvia was a part of this explosive group of states, which broke out of the hegemonic power relations even if the ‘Soviet rule seemed eternal’ (Alexievich, 2016, p.59; see also Yurchak, 2013). The Soviet national anthem for decades in people’s minds constructed the notion of the ‘unbreakable union of free republics’ and people were led to believe that they were co-producers and participants in this great scheme (Zinoviev, 1986). However, while from below an impenetrable state was created ‘from above, it was vulnerable and defenceless’ (Alexievich, 2016, p.123), which ostensibly led to the demise of Soviet power.

After the breakdown of the Soviet project all of the ex-Soviet states were on a new political trajectory framed by the neoliberal agenda in which the Western style neoliberalism was presented as the only way forward - there were no alternatives (Kotz, 2015). The transition process within each of the ex-Soviet states was different but the Baltic nations were seen as a success story due to the low level of ethnic violence that escalated during the transition period, despite the proportionately large Russian-speaking community that resided within the Baltic countries. Just before the break down of the Soviet project in 1989, barely half of Latvia’s population was ‘Latvian’ (Clemens, 2010). This was a result of the Soviet ‘russification’ process that was implemented through migration policies during the Soviet regime.<sup>12</sup> Russian nationals were encouraged to migrate to the Soviet peripheries, in order to establish appropriate

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<sup>12</sup> It should also be acknowledged that there is a long-standing history of Russian speaking population living in Latvian territory, which predates the Soviet project and Latvia’s statehood. In fact, during the 18th century the whole territory of Latvia became a part of the Russian Empire, which significantly affected the way penal policies developed. The reforms introduced by Catherine the Great should be particularly highlighted (Krūmiņš & Pokšāns, 1996).

Russian speaker representation and control across all of the Soviet states. Therefore, for Latvians breaking away from the Soviet project meant reclaiming the lost power and finding the voice that had been silenced and marginalised for decades; it was the rebirth of nationhood (Cheskin, 2016). Thus, for many smaller nations, including Latvians, it was just as much about transforming their economies as cultural empowerment and the recreation of national identity.<sup>13</sup> However, not all had equal opportunities to become empowered – women, as with Russian-speakers, struggled to ‘fit into’ the new order. The official political narratives in Latvia embraced a nationalist and masculinised state from which women were excluded; women and femininity became ‘depoliticised or solely linked to the maternal role’ (Zake, 2002, p.638). Thus, the attainment of legitimate political power for women in Latvia during the transition period was out of reach. Similar trends could be noted across the post-Soviet space where ‘a relatively few, mostly men, became extravagantly wealthy; many more, the majority of them women, became desperately poor’ (Engel, 2004, p.257).

Solzhenitsyn’s predicament of great hardships during the transition process became a reality in the early 90’s. The initial transition process from the ‘old order’ to the ‘new’, by using Durkheimian terms, could be described as a state of ‘anomie’ in which society lost its control over containment and regulation of norms that aim to restrain rampant individual desires (Rawlinson, 2010; see also Slade & Light, 2015). Those who took a gamble and fought for power and influence either by legal or illegal means were reaping the benefits of the moment of crisis as ‘the potential for rapid profits for those who got in first was tremendous’ (Klein, 2007, p.176). This period

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<sup>13</sup> Pabriks and Purs (2001, p.86) have highlighted that the memory of the first independence helped the Baltic nations to ‘maximise their efforts for independence, and also helped them organise themselves once independence was achieved’.

offered once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to those who were quick to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances and use the lack of regulatory enforcement capabilities to their advantage. As Alexievich (2016, p.58) suggests, in the 90's you had to 'snatch it – get your hands on it before anyone else' it was a pure race for the capitalist dream but it came with blood and violent fights for power and influence. Pallot and Piacentini assisted by Moran (2012) have also suggested that those who were previously involved in the 'illegal markets' were in the most advantageous position to use the opportunities provided by the transition process.

The immediate outcome of 'gangster capitalism' was 'illicit and violent acquisition of newly privatised assets, and the unbridled exploitation of the country's most vulnerable citizens' (Rawlinson, 2010, p.2). Rising levels of crime was one of the features of the post-Soviet transformation (Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2011), as well as falling life expectancy and standards of living (Slade & Light, 2015). The newly acquired liberties and values promoted a society in which the pursuit of private gains became the dominant principle of social and economic life (Currie, 1997). As a consequence the line between organised crime and official representation became blurred (Transcrime, 2008). It can also be argued that the blurred lines between legalities and illegalities were also an extension of the socio-legal implications ostensibly inherited from the Soviet project namely the established 'dual reality' or mismatch between formal and informal norms and regulations in which informality largely prevails over the formal institutional settings and roles (Kosals & Maksimova, 2015). Similar arguments have been made by Krupnyk (2018, p.124), who suggests that the Soviet system was based on double standards and significant discrepancies between written normative acts and reality. In addition, for decades the Soviet people were

accustomed to cheating the system for survival (Rawlinson, 2010)<sup>14</sup> as well as witnessing the ‘moral hypocrisy’ of the Communist party (Boettke, 1993). Thus, the Soviet regime established a particular political-cultural environment in which ‘moral hypocrisy’ and ‘rule breaking’ were normalised and common practice.

The ‘moral hypocrisy’ and rule breaking continued during the transition period in which a shock therapy was promoted as a means for achieving economic stability and a prosperous future even if initially it worsened conditions for the majority. Those who pointed this out ‘were told that it was the only ‘possible’ approach’ (Kotz, 2015, p.122). The shock therapy along with the shift from state owned means of production to private ownership led to large scale deindustrialisation and unemployment. The annual unemployment rate in Latvia in 1996 amounted to 20.5% with the rural areas being the most affected by the transition process due to the break-up of large collective farms (Eglitis & Lace, 2009).<sup>15</sup> The fluctuating monetary value and a number of banking failures<sup>16</sup> added to the grim socio-economic reality and widespread instabilities. However, there were no criticisms of the selected path and, as suggested by Bohle and Greskovits (2012), this was partly due to the fact that it was the nationalist project and the newly obtained freedom could not be contested. Thus, as elaborated by Eglitis (2011, p.431) the consent to neoliberalism was ‘engineered through powerful global and local currents that render alternatives illegitimate and critique problematic’.

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<sup>14</sup> Pilfering was rife in the Soviet project, where people through ‘useful’ connections could obtain cheaper products illegally taken from the workplace (Žilinskienė, 2018).

<sup>15</sup> This have had a long term consequences in Latvia as rural areas and towns in economically deprived regions, have been abandoned by young people and remain ‘inhabited almost solely by those who have been left behind on the road to progress’ or those who are not afraid to ‘waste’ their lives (Eglitis & Lace, 2009, p.338).

<sup>16</sup> In the mid-90’s the biggest and fastest growing bank in Latvia ‘Baltija’ went bankrupt taking with it many peoples savings and trust in the newly established system.

The powerful global currents were represented by the guidance of the West via external advisors and financial tools. The focus was on political and economic prescriptions, which included privatisation, deregulation of economic life, dismantling welfare support and establishing a competitive, multi-party political system (Szelenyi, 2014). Bohle and Greskovits (2012) have also highlighted that the Baltic states rigidly followed neoliberal prescriptions and liberalised markets and lifted capital controls as well as reducing to a minimum provisions for social welfare (see also Aidukaite, 2003; Aidukaite, 2009).<sup>17</sup> Thus, the new macroeconomic conditions embodied such characteristics as: free competition, diverse private ownership, limited state control and intervention in business and social processes, limited public expenditure (for education, medicine, science and welfare recipients) and rising income inequalities (Vilks, 1998).

Similar to other countries in which neoliberal policies have been applied this resulted in the ‘greater concentration of wealth in the hands of few and greater poverty’ (Lacey, 2013, p.264).<sup>18</sup> Ultimately the individual was held responsible for thriving in this new environment, as within the post-Soviet context this meant moving from being socialists to being millionaires with new rules: ‘if you have money, you count – no money, you’re nothing’ (Alexievich, 2016, p.43). Social injustice and inequality became morally acceptable as long as it was seen as the result of freely made choices (Thorsen, 2010). Through the individualisation of responsibility the post-Soviet states passively emulated the neoliberal approach of providing limited public assistance (Lappi-Seppälä, 2011) and orienting surveillance towards protecting ‘the interests of capital against the

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<sup>17</sup> Vanhuysse (2009, p.61) has referred to Latvia’s welfare state as ‘particularly lean and mean’.

<sup>18</sup> This has been evidenced by the Gini index, which measures the fairness of income distribution, in the mid-2000’s Latvia had the highest income disparities across the 30 European countries (Lapi-Seppälä, 2011). This trend has continued and also in 2017 Latvia’s Gini index was one of the highest among the EU countries (Eurostat, 2019).

poor and unemployed' (Wacquant, 2009, p.29). People seemed to be left to fend for themselves, which meant 'shifting socially generated problems to the individual to solve them' (Yakunin, 2013, p.153). As ironically suggested by Terzens (2007, cited in Eglitis & Lace, 2009, p.329):

'Not long ago, it was the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic, but now - the Latvian Capitalist Republic. With all of the accompanying consequences. Some still say that Latvia is now free, but, unfortunately, they don't even bother to explain – free from what... They say, free and that's all, [and] just be satisfied with that. Everything that existed in the past is bad and – everything that exists today is very good... Slide on your poor slippers and walk unhindered in your new, free world. And don't be asking if you are needed by anyone out there. Better ask: does anyone here still need you?'

### **3.2 The Transition from 'Homo Sovieticus' to 'Homo Consumericus'**

The collapse of the Soviet project was not only an economic transition or national revival it was also an individual transition from the previously created 'Homo sovieticus' (Alexievich, 2016; Zinoviev, 1986) to 'Homo consumericus' (Saad, 2007). As a Russian film director and screenwriter Zvyagintsev (2017) critically commented, it was a period of time when humanity changed:

'We seemed not to notice that suddenly in front of our eyes humanity changed. We were absolutely not ready for the capitalistic way of life, for survival in this abandoned state a savage aroused in us, [which meant] they lost value in others, they turned into a tool for achieving selfish goals, they turned into competitors and ultimately the enemy.'

The Soviet people were finally able to experience the seductive comfort of free-market capitalism. Markets became flooded with consumer goods and different services; people were lured into neoliberal traps or as pointed out by Eglitis (2011, p.424) it was



consumerism that ‘filled the semantic and social vacuum left by the rejection of ideology and practices associated with the communist past’. The free market was there to feed people’s wants, needs and desires and people wanted to have more and better things after being starved of consumption during socialism but soon they realised that the fulfilment of desires are limited to the few (Alexievich, 2016). The general assumption might be that there are unintended (positive) social benefits for people acting in their own self-interests as the overspill should be felt also by others. However, the overspill is not felt much by people at the lower end of the distribution of wealth scale who have limited options to escape social insecurities, poverty and ultimately penalty (see Klein, 2007).

The breakdown of the Soviet project brought the Soviet people into late modernity in which a shift in consciousness takes place. This implies the focus on individualism, expressivity, and identity (Hayward & Young, 2004) all of which is contrary to the previously embraced values of collectivism, ordinariness and sameness. This added another layer to the ‘crisis of being’, which takes place in late modernity by a mismatch between wants and reality (Hayward & Young, 2004). It can be argued that the ‘crisis of being’ was magnified for Soviet people as the world that they knew and were accustomed to turned upside down – this new world represented all that they had been taught to despise since childhood. The trope of loss (Alexievich, 2016; Oushakine, 2009) and shock (Friedman, 2007) can be used to conceptualise peoples’ experiences in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet project. Those who were the ‘true believers’ suffered the most as they witnessed their meaning of life being destroyed – they became foreigners in their own country (Alexievich, 2016). All that hard work, which was

devoted to building communism, was in vain – the new agenda presented a different narrative<sup>19</sup> in which new heroes displaced the old ones:

‘Where are you going to see a metro station devoted to dairymaids, lathe operators, or engine drivers today? They are nowhere to be seen – they’re not in the newspapers, they’re not on TV, and they’re nowhere near the Kremlin when they’re handing out medals and awards. They’re not anywhere anymore. Everywhere you look, you see our new heroes: bankers and businessmen, models and prostitutes... managers.’  
(Alexievich, 2016, p.53)

It was this anticipated moment in which ‘a grandiose turning point in culture’ (Zinoviev, 1986, p.125) took place. This has been overlooked and perhaps not even understood by many Westerners for whom the breakdown of the Soviet project meant the supremacy of democratic values and a market economy. For many people from both sides of the iron curtain this was indeed a moment of celebration and little attention was paid to the fact that this process meant the reconfiguration of human existence and the embedded value system. The majority of people ‘had to relearn how to live from scratch’ moving away from previously hated money to a new notion in which ‘money became synonymous with freedom’ (Alexievich, 2016, p.55) and greed was right and good (Rawlinson, 2010).

However, not all aspects of the ‘Homo sovieticus’ could be eradicated and, in fact, some characteristics of the obedient and hardship-resistant ‘Homo sovieticus’ were useful for the new neoliberal regime, especially for overcoming the crisis of capitalism or ‘systemic risks’, which result from the internal contradictions of capital accumulation (Harvey, 2010). The next section highlights how the legacy of the Soviet oppressive

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<sup>19</sup> Similarly, as suggested by Eglitis and Lace (2009, p.336), ‘the industrial and collective farm ‘heroes’ of Soviet ideology and practice have been nullified by the new order’ in Latvia.

regime assisted the neoliberal project to enforce its rules and regulations in Latvia during the global economic crisis in the late 2000's seamlessly and without any resistance. This not only confirms Latvia's neoliberal trajectory but also highlights the Soviet legacy.

### **3.3 Latvian 'Neoliberal Spectrum' and the Global Economic Crisis**

The global economic crisis in the late 2000's provides a good example of where Latvia stands on the neoliberal spectrum or the transition to neoliberalism.<sup>20</sup> Some economists have called Latvia's response to the global crisis 'Latvia's neoliberal madness' pointing out the disastrous effects of the implemented neoliberal approach (Hudson & Sommers, 2010).

Due to the global crisis Latvia experienced a double-digit fall in its GDP growth rate, rising unemployment and cuts in wages and pensions (Koyama, 2010). Consequently Latvia had to use its fiscal policy,<sup>21</sup> which meant severe budget austerity measures. The public sector was the first to be affected by a reduction in staffing levels (in September 2008 the Latvian government took the decision to cut the number of public office holders by 10%) and those who stayed had to accept wage cuts. However, those measures were not sufficient and later that year the Latvian government

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<sup>20</sup> Although as established by Bohle and Greskovits (2007; 2012) Latvia has strictly followed the neoliberal path and due to the fact that the central-right parties have had uninterrupted hegemony over politics in Latvia, this has been reflected also in the policies of the country.

<sup>21</sup> Latvia's monetary policy could not be used to improve the macroeconomic situation even if, at that time, Latvia had its own currency (lats) as the exchange rate was fixed to the euro (Latvia had a fixed exchange rate with euros since it joined Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM II) in May 2005 with a rate of 0.702804 to the euro), maintaining a 1% fluctuation margin and it had to remain so if Latvia wanted to join the Eurozone (European Commission, 2018; see also Bohle and Greskovits, 2012).

approached the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Union (EU) for financial support and substantial loans were agreed in the following months.<sup>22</sup>

According to the IMF (2010) the Latvian government took the following measures in order to reduce spending: merged public agencies, closed underutilized hospitals, reduced the number of teachers, terminated contracts with almost 6,000 public employees and applied an 18 % average wage cut to the remaining staff (later it rose to 30%). As the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EFPSU) (2011) argued, governments were making public sector workers pay for the crisis. The social safety net was reduced to 0.1 percent of the GDP to cover health support for the poor and transportation for schoolchildren, although 1% was allowed under the agreement with the lending authorities. It was further admitted that many of the savings came from ‘reductions in the quality or scope of public services’, which included such decisions as ‘to suspend elective surgery unless the patient pays in full, abolition of university grants for poorer students, and cuts in research spending’ (IMF, 2010, p.6).

Prison services were also not exempt from the austerity measures. Several prisons were merged in 2008 and the penal estate was downsized from 15 prisons to 12 in order to save resources. Prison staff wages from July 2009 were reduced by 24%, and from the 1st of August until 31 December 2009 prison staff had to switch to a part-time 32 hour working week instead of 40 hours (Kamnenska, Puce & Laganovska, 2013). This contributed towards the grossly inadequate staffing levels within the prison estate, which was pointed out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT)

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<sup>22</sup> The EU assistance programme to Latvia was agreed in December 2008 of 7.5 billion euro, eventually only 4.5 billion was paid out and by year 2015 75% of the EU loan was already repaid (European Commission, 2019).

(2011) later that year.<sup>23</sup> A significant reduction of prison staff has been found between years 2008 and 2013, during which Latvia lost 30.5% of prison staff, although the number of prisoners was also declining, but the ratio of prisoners to staff increased from 1.9 to 2.2 (Fulton, 2016).

This brief description of implemented austerity measures serves as evidence of Wacquant's (2009) argument about a 'centaur state' that takes a liberal approach towards market economy and much firmer and punitive stances when it comes to dealing with the consequences of the implemented liberal market policies, which harm society. It should also be pointed out that a 'centaur state' is especially effective within the post-Soviet Latvian context as people still 'share a communist collective memory' (Alexievich, 2016, p.25) in which obedience plays an important role. The fact that the austerity measures were simply accepted and there were no major protests or disruptions within the country<sup>24</sup> highlights the persistence of 'Homo sovieticus', which explains peoples unwillingness to voice 'their concerns through public action in the form of demonstrations, protests or strikes' (Maslauskaite & Zorgenfrei, 2013, p.64).

Thus, the paradoxical response to the austerity measures should be viewed through a socio-cultural lens, which suggests that the previous oppressive regime assisted the neoliberal project to enforce its rules and regulations without any resistance. For decades the Soviet project worked upon the installation of obedience within the Soviet people and this proved to be useful even after the break down of the Soviet project for making people face up to the consequences of the global market economy.

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<sup>23</sup> Although this has been an ongoing issue (see CPT, 2009).

<sup>24</sup> This was contrary to what happened in Greece, which had to implement similar austerity measures.

Neoliberalism also benefitted from almost non-existent civil society<sup>25</sup> and labour unions (Aidukaite, 2009) as during the transition process everything that was associated with the previous regime (such as labour unions) was dismantled (Alexievich, 2016). The symbols of the old system were ripped apart quite literally as one of the immediate aftermaths of the breakdown of the Soviet project was the removal of the symbols of communism. People were keen to tackle the visible legacy of the Soviet regime namely by changing the names of the streets and demolishing the monuments of prominent communist figures that stood in the city centres (see Kagarlitsky, 2008). They were dismantled and taken down but that was just the tip of the iceberg. The Soviet legacy runs much deeper than the visual reproductions of the regime and its 'great' leaders, but at that time there was neither commitment to reflect on the significance of what was happening nor a sound judgement about future directions. As ironically suggested by Zinoviev (1986, p.131) 'from bondage there is an escape: to freedom. But from freedom, there's no way out'.

### **3.4 The Transition Process and Penalty: the Soviet Penal Inheritance and Gender Perspectives**

The immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet project resulted in a more unsettling period within the post-Soviet space, which, by using Bauman's (2013, p.190) terms, can be referred to as a time of interregnum in which:

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<sup>25</sup> As suggested by Cornwall, Gideon & Wilson (2008, p.3) civil society has an increasingly important role 'as an all-purpose intermediary which would simultaneously keep the state in check, make up for its shortcomings, use proximity to 'the poor' to help them to help themselves, and represent the masses who could not speak for themselves'.

‘the old ways of doing things no longer work, the old learned or inherited modes of life are no longer suitable for the current *conditio humana*, but when the new ways of tackling the challenges and new modes of life better suited to the new conditions have not as yet been invented, put in place, and set in operation.’

Thus, while some Western countries moved from the ‘old’ to the ‘new penology’ based on a rationale of managing dangerous groups more efficiently and in a cost-effective way (Feeley & Simon, 1992), Latvia, like other post-Soviet countries, experienced this period of interregnum as one of rapidly rising crime levels (see appendix 1 Figure 3 and Figure 4) (CSBL, 2017a; 2017b), social insecurity and violence (Rawlinson, 2010).<sup>26</sup> ‘Gangster capitalism’ in particular could blossom as during the transition period the business activity went hand-in-hand with criminality (Alexievich, 2016; Galeotti, 2018; Rawlinson, 2010; Varese, 2002). The sharp rise in criminality and overall instability within the post-Soviet countries was met by collusion between the ‘official’ authority and the illicit criminal authority or as argued by Varese (2002) criminal authority was used to provide ‘private security’. Organised crime groups controlled business activity through extortion and racketeering (Transcrime, 2008) and successful business development was impossible without the involvement of organised criminal groups (see Galeotti, 2018). This has had a lasting impact in Latvia as it is frequently singled out as more prone to corruption and state capture (Kärrstrand, 2007).<sup>27</sup>

Despite the turbulent transition process and rapidly changing social conditions, developments within the penal system were slow due to the adherence to the Soviet

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<sup>26</sup> In early 90s, Latvia was among those post-Soviet countries, which experienced the greatest increase in crime rates (Zvekic, 1998, cited in Slade & Light, 2015, p.149).

<sup>27</sup> ‘State capture’ means a condition in which the state regulatory agencies operate and legislate in accordance with the private interests instead of the public; this is common among transition economies (Hellman *et al.*, 2000).

inherited legal framework (Kronberga, 2016).<sup>28</sup> This implied a repressive system of punishment with long prison sentences and a high volume of pre-trial detention (Rozenbergs, 2012). As suggested by Solomon (2015) the post-Soviet states applied ‘distorted neo-inquisitorialism’, which meant ‘the excessive power of investigators and weaknesses of judges’ (Solomon, 2015, p.159). This ostensibly is one of the major contributing factors to a high volume of pre-trial detention. Zubkov (2005, cited in Zahars, 2006, p.49), a Russian scholar, points out that remand imprisonment should be viewed as a form of ‘criminal repression’ because the defendant is detained for a long time without being charged. It can be also seen as a continuity of previously applied methods, as under Soviet interrogation it used to be a common objective ‘to wear out nerves, weaken the body, break resistance, and force the prisoner to sign whatever is required’ (Ginzburg, 1967, p.69) with no consideration to the rights of the detainee (see Aizupe, 1974; Solzhenitsyn, 1974). Thus, while currently such torturous interrogations do not occur in Latvia, the criminal justice system still seems to struggle with breaking away from the crime control model (see Packer, 1968).

The Soviet rule in Latvia after the Second World War and up until 1990s significantly changed Latvia’s penal system. Krūmiņš and Pokšāns (1996) argue that the Soviets deemed the Latvian prison system to be unacceptable and so the first penal correctional colonies were established in 1941. This was even before Latvia was officially incorporated into the Soviet system.<sup>29</sup> Most of the Latvian prisons were small

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<sup>28</sup> Although significant changes were introduced, for example, in 1993 the mandatory nature of prison labour was lifted mainly due to the lack of capacity to provide work inside penal institutions (Krūmiņš & Pokšāns, 1996).

<sup>29</sup> All prison governors were removed in the early 1940s. Only those who were ‘reliable’ and loyal to the Soviet regime could take up these positions. Prison governor in Daugavpils, for example, was one of the released political prisoners and similarly other prison governors had a revolutionary past and leftist views (Krūmiņš & Pokšāns, 1996).



at the time. The Soviet approach was either to expand and remodel them as correctional colonies, or close them down. The difference between a correctional colony and a prison is that in the former prisoners move around freely within the permitted area, whereas in the latter prisoners are locked up in their cells. Turning Latvian prisons into penal correctional colonies also served a strategic purpose. For example, the correctional colony in Liepaja was established in 1958 in order to supply the 'Red metallurgy' with a work force, which struggled to recruit workers (Krūmiņš and Pokšāns, 1996). Prison labour was also used in construction works and many well-known objects in Latvia, as in other parts of the Soviet project (see Applebaum, 2003; Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2011), were built by prisoners. The central apparatus in Moscow could demand any amount of prisoners from occupied Latvia and, at times, it was hard to meet the required quota (Krūmiņš and Pokšāns, 1996). Thus, many of the penal establishments in Latvia just like in other peripheries were functioning as transit facilities, which supplied the 'captive workforce' for the Soviet camps (see Haney, 2010). The opposite happened during the early 90s, when Latvia broke away from the Soviet project while adapting to European standards (Krūmiņš and Pokšāns, 1996).

However, breaking away from the Soviet legacy in penalty proved to be difficult. The predominant focus on deprivation of liberty and harsh sentencing or the continuous application of the Soviet legal framework during the period of transition coupled with rising criminality resulted in a growing prison population. From 1990 to 1995 the total prison population in Latvia grew from 8,726 to 9,633, which per 100,000 of national population accounted for 327 and 385 respectively (Institute for Criminal

Policy Research, 2019).<sup>30</sup> Prison overcrowding and poor conditions also led to the spread of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis (TB) that developed into multidrug-resistant strains of TB the rate of which was one of the highest in the world (Brown, 2004).<sup>31</sup>

In addition to the overcrowded and disease-infested prison conditions, the Latvian prison system was placed under further pressure by the withdrawal of Russian military personnel who were involved in maintaining prison security until 1994. This coincided with the largest prison escape in which eighty-nine prisoners broke free from Parlielupe prison in Jelgava. In just one year -1994, a total of sixteen escapes took place with 125 inmates breaking out of custody (Kamenska, 2006).<sup>32</sup> However, the total prison population continued to grow and according to Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (CSBL) data, the total prison population peaked during the late 90's reaching over 10,000 people in custodial institutions (CSBL, 2019b).

Nevertheless, the rate of imprisonment has followed a downward trend ever since the peak period of the late 90s (see appendix 1 Figure 5). This happened despite

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<sup>30</sup> Although in comparison with the 80's it was a substantial reduction of the amount of prisoners in custody as in 1980 there were 12341 and in 1985 16924 people within the custodial institutions respectively (Institute for Criminal Policy Research, 2019). However, at the time, prisons did not hold only prisoners from the Soviet Latvia but from all over the vast Soviet project.

<sup>31</sup> The first major reconstruction project in penal system was launched in 1995 in order to build a medical unit for people who suffered from TB. However, there were many obstacles and complications during the construction process and multiple attempts were needed before a fully functioning TB unit was opened (The State Audit Office, 2002; 2014).

<sup>32</sup> Prisoners gained control over penal facilities and as pointed out by Krūmiņš and Pokšāns (1996) the favourable prison reforms were passed after mass disturbances organised by prisoners. The prison reform in the early 90s was characterised by the extension of prisoner rights – they were allowed to wear their own clothing, restrictions on written communication (letters) was lifted, prisoner visits and the food parcel allowance increased, and the use of personal TV and radio was allowed as well as phone calls.

the fact that the new Criminal Law that was introduced in 1998 (in force 1999)<sup>33</sup> increased the length of prison sentences for serious and particularly serious crimes. However, at the same time, the new law also introduced alternatives to custody - community service and extended the range of offences for which fines could be applied (Kamenska, 2006). Thus, for Latvia the fundamental restructuring of the economy and deindustrialization only initially resulted in the increased use of imprisonment. Since the late 90s Latvia has witnessed a substantial downsizing of the carceral state<sup>34</sup> and a notable decrease in the prison population, which has more than halved during the last 25 years contrary to other Western countries in which the rate of imprisonment has risen to unprecedented levels (see Brandariz-Garcia, Melossi & Sozzo, 2017; Wacquant, 2012). Latvia was among the group of countries in the Council of Europe with the highest decrease in the rate of imprisonment between 2016 and 2018. The overall rate of imprisonment in Europe fell by 6.6 % whereas in Latvia it decreased by 8.4% (Aebi & Tiago, 2018).

In order to explain those trends in Latvia, it is important to highlight the context in which they emerge. Latvia's move towards greater leniency in penal matters or the path towards humanising the justice system as in other post-Soviet countries, can be attributed to 'the rise of rights consciousness' (Pallot & Katz, 2017, p.201). This was a consequence of externally induced changes, which stem from international obligations

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<sup>33</sup> It should be also pointed out that from the 1st of April 1999 the penal administration was transferred from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Justice (see The Sentence Execution Code of Latvia, 1970). This was a significant shift to de-militarise Latvian penal estate.

<sup>34</sup> From 15 prisons in the 90s the Latvian prison estate has shrunk to 9 in 2019 (LPA, 2019) corresponding to the diminishing prison population (LPA, 2018).

(see Piacentini & Slade, 2015).<sup>35</sup> However, during 90's some local practitioners more critically assessed the introduced legal reforms due to the lack of financial and material support for their implementation (Krūmiņš & Pokšāns, 1996).

In the case of Latvia the accession proceedings to the EU and NATO played a particularly important role.<sup>36</sup> The imposed conditionality (the EU *acquis*) to all those ex-Soviet countries that were willing to become fully-fledged members of the EU meant that they had to implement certain policies and adhere to the set accession criteria (Savi & Randma-Liiv, 2013).<sup>37</sup> It should be also acknowledged that the EU not only instigated changes within the legal and institutional framework (for example, the introduction of the Probation Service a year before joining the EU) but also absorbed the 'surplus' labour force once Latvia joined the EU.<sup>38</sup> Consequently Latvia, unlike other Western countries did not have to resort to imprisonment for managing the 'surplus' labour force (see Lynch & Verma, 2018) as emigration from Latvia became 'the new normal' (Hazans, 2016, p.314).

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<sup>35</sup> Latvia joined the Council of Europe in 1995 and a moratorium on the death penalty was announced in 1996, which was a precondition for joining the Council of Europe (Kamenska, 2006). However, Latvia remains the last EU member state to have performed an execution, which took place in 1996. Moreover, it was not until 2012 that Latvia ratified the Council of Europe Protocol No. 13 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms Concerning the Abolition of the Death Penalty in all circumstances and the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Behrmann & Yorke, 2013).

<sup>36</sup> In addition, it should be pointed out that there has been long standing cooperation in criminal justice matters with other non-EU member states such as Norway (see LPA, 2018).

<sup>37</sup> Although Dolwitz and Marsh (2000, p.17) have pointed out that policy transfers are not always successful - one of the reasons being 'inappropriate transfer', which entails failing to consider 'the differences between the economic, social, political and ideological contexts in the transferring and the borrowing country'. Thus, while the Western more advanced models and technologies were seemingly appealing to the ex-Soviet bloc countries the availability of sources and capabilities were incompatible.

<sup>38</sup> Latvia achieved full-fledged membership of the EU and NATO in 2004.

Various international and local scholars have highlighted the positive impact of the democratisation process and EU membership on the criminal justice system in the Central and Eastern European countries. Walmsley (2005) has pointed out that the establishment of democratic institutions significantly improved the administration of punishment. Such initiatives as new penal codes, placing prison systems under the Ministry of Justice instead of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and other advances brought the Central and Eastern European countries closer aligned to the European Prison Rules. There were significant improvements in penal facilities in relation to food and sanitary arrangements; health care; increased access to means of communication – telephones, letters, visits; the development of treatment programmes; introduction of psychologists and social workers; development of complaints procedures and alternatives to imprisonment (Walmsley, 2005).

According to Walmsley (2005, p.11) the Council of Europe is the most powerful force in reforming prison practices in Europe and this is embodied through ‘the commissioning of assessment reports and the sponsoring of steering groups for reform of the prison systems’ (see also Daems and Robert, 2017). For example, one of the major early initiatives delivered by the Council of Europe in Latvia in the 90s was "The Nord-Balt Prison Project", which included cooperation between the Scandinavian<sup>39</sup> and Baltic<sup>40</sup> countries. For the duration of this project (1996 - 2000) European expertise and support was provided for developing and improving the prison system in the Baltic states (Janson, 2002). Daems and Robert (2017, p.4) suggest that the European approach towards punishment has become ‘a humanising or civilising force that

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<sup>39</sup> Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland.

<sup>40</sup> Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

embodies a mission to eradicate inhuman and degrading penal practices from the continent's penal institutions and practices' (see also van Zyl Smit, 2006).

Similarly, Latvian justice specialists have highlighted some of the positive trends since Latvia joined the EU. For example, recorded crime has decreased (including a drop in serious crime and traffic offenses), the number of convicted persons are falling (the most significant fall has been in convicted minors) and in sentencing there is a substantial increase in the application of alternative measures to custody, such as community service (Kronberga, 2014; Kronberga, 2016). According to the CSBL (2019a) the application of community service quadrupled between 2000 and 2017 (see appendix 1 Figure 6). Thus, unlike Central European countries that coupled 'punitiveness with national sovereignty and protection' by using tough, law and order rhetoric and penal nationalism (Haney, 2016, p.346) Latvia seemed to move away from penal punitiveness.<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, these positive changes have not equally affected all groups entry into the criminal justice system (see appendix 1 Figure 7) and there are notable gender differences. The women's prison population has not decreased at the same rate as that for men. The total percentage of women in custody in comparison to men reflects an upwards trend (see appendix 1 Figure 8) despite an overall reduction of the number of women in custody (see Zahars, 2017). While women accounted for 4.6 % of the total prison population in 2000, by 2018 it had increased to 7.7 % (Institute for Criminal Policy Research, 2019). This can be explained by Player's (2014, p.283) argument about 'equal opportunities' whereby as women come to be seen as acting like men, they

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<sup>41</sup> In general, law and order rhetoric has not surfaced to the same extent in Latvia as continuous high level corruption scandals effectively limit the use of penal populism.

are then subjected ‘to the same criminal justice responses as men’.<sup>42</sup> Although, as in other countries, women in Latvia account for a relatively small proportion of all known offenders (see Wright & Cain, 2018). According to the CSBL (2018) the number of women involved in criminal activities has not exceeded the 14.8 % mark of total known offenders at any point of time since 1990. This has been widely referred to as a ‘gender ratio problem’ (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988, p.508), which results in a criminal justice system that is conditioned by responses to male offending (Annison, Brayford & Deering, 2015; Player, 2014). Additionally, greater caution might be needed when interpreting women’s crime statistics because ‘small numerical increases or decreases can make a great deal of difference in terms of reported rises and reductions’ (Heidensohn & Silvestri, 2012, p.340).

Heidensohn and Silvestri (2012) also suggest that sentencing patterns (see also Burman *et al.*, 2015) as well as laws and policies can be central to understanding the rising volume of women appearing within the crime statistics. When considering changes within the legal framework in Latvia and amendments to the Criminal Law, it is notable that despite efforts to reduce the length of sentences, in certain areas there were no significant shifts or reductions envisaged, in particular, in cases of murder, drug

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<sup>42</sup> Similar trends have been reported from the USA where since the 1980s the women’s incarceration rate has increased twice as fast as that of men and it was suggested that ‘most penal systems have begun to imprison more and more women’ (U.S. Department of Justice, 2006, cited in Haney, 2010, p.73). Sudbury (2005, p.15) suggests that there has been a global rise in women’s imprisonment due to the globalisation of capital, which leads to ‘unprecedented incarceration and victimisation of immigrants, women and people of colour, and the poor’ (see also Baldwin, 2015b, Burman *et al.*, 2015). Although Gelsthorpe and Morris (2002, p.287) argue that ‘there is little evidence of an increased punitiveness solely towards women’. A more recent study from Sweden by Estrada *et al.* (2016, p.1288) evidences that the gender gap is narrowing due to a decrease of male offending with a potential of gender equality explaining ‘why men’s crime levels are moving towards those of women, rather than the reverse’ (see also Lauritsen *et al.*, 2009).

dealing, and sexual offences (Rozenbergs, 2012).<sup>43</sup> As many offences committed by women fall within those categories where no significant shifts were observed, this could be one of the contributing factors for the rate of women in custody not falling at the same pace as men.<sup>44</sup> This interpretation seems to be supported by the internal statistics of IWP. Out of all sentenced women (185 women in total) in 2015 - 105 were drug related offences, 42 murders or manslaughter, and 24 causing bodily harm.<sup>45</sup> Women on average were sentenced for two offences and 42% received a sentence longer than 5 years.<sup>46</sup> In relation to women on remand (98 women in total), 48 % (47) were accused of committing a very serious offence for which the length of sentence is above eight years; 21% were accused of serious crimes for which the length of the sentence ranged between three and eight years; whereas 31 % (30) accounted for less serious criminal offences that require less than three years of imprisonment. The internal statistical data indicates that women in Latvia still endure a repressive system of punishment with long prison sentences and a high volume of pre-trial detention.

It should also be highlighted that women's journey through the criminal justice system in Latvia, as in other countries, is characterised by gender specific experiences. Women's interaction and involvement with the criminal justice system tend to be

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<sup>43</sup> Similar developments were observed in the Polish penal system (see Pabjan, 2009).

<sup>44</sup> In addition, it should be pointed out that similar trends have been observed in other countries across the world. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2014, p.3) reported that 'the number of female prisoners is increasing at a faster rate than that of male prisoners' in certain countries such as in the USA, Colombia Australia, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, New Zealand, Argentina, Finland, Greece and the Netherlands.

<sup>45</sup> Although the most frequent criminal offences were property related (225 cases). Women in Latvia as in other countries tend to commit more acquisitive crimes (see Gelsthorpe & Wright, 2015; Prison Reform Trust, 2019).

<sup>46</sup> 59 women or 32% of those who were sentenced received 5-10 years of imprisonment, 17 women or 9.5 % received 10-20 years of imprisonment and one woman (0.5%) was serving a life sentence.



‘quantitatively and qualitatively different to that of men’ (Brennan *et al.*, 2018, p.2). Women commit fewer and less serious offences, therefore many women receive prison sentences for low-level crimes (Gelsthorpe & Morris, 2002; Burman *et al.*, 2015). Women also tend to have shorter criminal careers (Carlen & Worrall, 2004). Bosworth (1999, p.39) argues that there is ‘a gender binary between the general (men) and the particular (women)’ based on the assumption that law breaking is a more natural activity for men than women (Carlen & Worrall, 2004). Consequently, the double deviance theory suggests that women who offend are more likely to be up-tariffed and receive harsher sentences for transgressing against both the criminal law and gender norms (Carlen, 1983; Carlen & Worrall, 2004; Heidensohn, 1985). Thus, women are being blamed and shamed for ‘violating cultural norms on ‘womanhood’’ (Piacentini, Pallot & Moran, 2009, p.529) or, as suggested by Sharpe (2015, p.412), women are ‘judged against the conventional identity scripts’ like that of ‘mother, worker, and citizen’, which often locate women in a precarious position.

There are other factors, which contribute towards women remaining in a disadvantaged position to men. As in other countries, women in Latvia are located further away from their families in comparison to their male counterparts - there is just one women’s prison (there are 7 prisons for men and there is one open mixed prison). Pallot (2007) suggests that women’s imprisonment in Russia can be referred to as ‘double isolation’ because it is not only the fact of incarceration but also the distance from their families that contributes towards isolation (see also Katz & Pallot, 2014; Piacentini, Pallot & Moran, 2009). Their ties with families and friends can become severely damaged, but if located within male prisons women become ‘second-class citizens’ (Carlen & Worrall, 2004, p.55). Moreover, due to the small numbers of women

in custody and the fact that there is just one all-female prison in Latvia, all women are held together<sup>47</sup> regardless of the severity of the offences committed.

However, on the other hand, multiple protections have been granted to women prisoners and a positive discrimination policy operated until recently. For example, as there is just one all women's prison in Latvia and it is classified as a semi-closed prison, women are spared from a closed high security prison, unlike men. Thus, they can enjoy a more lenient prison regime. This was found as a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights by the ECtHR as men had been treated differently to women.<sup>48</sup> As suggested by Daems and Robert (2017, p.2), the ECtHR 'has come to set boundaries to what is acceptable in terms of inflicting punishment on offenders and the physical and social conditions in which sentences are executed'. Moreover, the Sentence Execution Code of Latvia (1970)<sup>49</sup> prescribed for women a greater living space within shared cells (3 m<sup>2</sup> instead of 2.5m<sup>2</sup> for men). Only in 2015 changes were introduced to assure that each prisoner regardless of gender is eligible of at least 4 m<sup>2</sup> living space in a shared accommodation, which is in compliance with the international standards.<sup>50</sup>

In addition, a 'maternal mandate' (Pallof & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012) privileges women and their role as mothers. The 'maternal mandate' in Latvian prisons

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<sup>47</sup> This also includes women who are sentenced for white-collar crime, for which men have a separate unit. However, there is a separate section within the women's prison for female juveniles.

<sup>48</sup> A case *Ēcis v Latvia* (2019) raised the issue of gender discrimination in sentencing. A male prisoner sued Latvia for discrimination as women who have committed similar offences and were serving the same sentence had more lenient conditions.

<sup>49</sup> It has been amended 42 times since entering into force in 1971 (The Sentence Execution Code of Latvia, 1970).

<sup>50</sup> According to the minimum standards, set by the CPT, 4 square metres should be provided for each prisoner in shared accommodation and 6 square metres for an individual prison cell (see CPT, 2015).

entails various protective measures such as: exemption from punishment,<sup>51</sup> the food ratio is increased for pregnant women and those who breastfeed and mothers are allowed to stay in a special mother and baby unit in prison until a child reaches 4 years of age. Thus women's role as a mother is being heavily guarded and protected. But at the same time similar to observations made by Moran, Pallot and Piacentini (2009, p.704) in Russia, women are frequently seen as 'bad' mothers and that 'the institution is better able 'to give the children a childhood' than their biological mothers' (see also Engel, 2004). This judgement of 'maternal deficiency' is enduring and continues after the sentence (Baldwin, 2015).

There are thus many subtle differences in how women's penalty and imprisonment is regulated in Latvia in comparison to men. On the one hand women enjoy additional protections through the 'maternal mandate' (see Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012) and other gendered measures, which categorise them as 'particular' (Bosworth, 1999) and in need of additional safeguards. On the other hand the various practical implications that emerge from the 'gender ratio problem' (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988) such as the 'double isolation' (Katz & Pallot, 2014) or a second class citizenship within male institutions (Carlen & Worrall, 2004) all contribute towards creating damaging gender specific implications for women who find themselves entangled within the criminal justice system. This, of course, also should be viewed in the context of historical experience and rapid changes that occurred within the country after the breakdown of the Soviet project. Latvia was and still can be deemed as a country in transition, but as rightly pointed out by Simon and Sparks (2013,

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<sup>51</sup> Pregnant women and mothers with infants are exempted from the internal punishment of solitary confinement and women with children over one year old can receive a maximum of 10 days of solitary confinement instead of 15 (The Sentence Execution Code of Latvia, 1970).

p.2) punishment and society is always in transition as whatever punishment and society is today 'it is not likely to last forever, since it arises from, and speaks to, conditions that are themselves quite historically specific'.

In conclusion, this Chapter encapsulated the significance of the transition process, which instigated the fundamental shift within the socio-political environment and human consciousness. The transition process from the Soviet state apparatus, which imposed a specific way of life and forms of thinking, to liberal democracy and the neoliberal state, was turbulent and crime and its control mechanisms played an important role in establishing the new order as the breakdown of the Soviet hegemonic power led to widespread violence and instability.

However, the fundamental restructuring process for such a small country like Latvia meant not only changing the political and economic systems but also resulted in cultural empowerment and the rebirth of nationhood (Cheskin, 2016). Thus, the shift to neoliberalism in the context of Latvia cannot be divorced from the national rhetoric of building a 'free' Latvian state. Moreover, as much as it was about the changes in the socioeconomic and political context, it was also about an individual transition, which meant the reconfiguration of human existence and the embedded value system. But the Soviet legacy on the individual level could not be immediately eradicated and, in fact, some of the characteristics such as obedience and resilience to hardships were useful for the new neoliberal regime especially during periods of crisis.

The second half of this Chapter focused on changes within penalty, which emerged from the transition process. Despite the initial state of anomie or a time of interregnum (Bauman, 2013), which can be associated with increased levels of crime

and social insecurities or the ‘gangster capitalism’ (Alexievich, 2016; Rawlinson, 2010), over time Latvia witnessed a substantial downsizing of the carceral state and a notable decrease of the prison population, which has more than halved during the last 25 years. The influence of the membership of international organisations such as the Council of Europe, NATO and the EU should be acknowledged in relation to those penal developments. The latter should be in particular highlighted as the EU not only instigated changes within the legal and institutional framework but it also absorbed Latvian surplus labour force. Yet, women within the criminal justice system seem not to have benefitted from those changes to the same extent as men. The total percentage of women in custody in comparison to men, shows an upwards trend and the gender gap within the criminal justice system seems to be narrowing but of course, women still account for a relatively small proportion of all alleged offenders. It should also be pointed out that women’s imprisonment can be characterised by various special custodial provisions, which differentiate and seemingly ‘soften’ custodial experience for women prisoners, especially those who qualify for the ‘maternal mandate’ (see Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012).

## Chapter 4 Inside Prison Walls: Surrendering Gendered Docile Bodies?

### Introduction

This Chapter aims to bring the ‘clash of the titans’ inside the prison whilst mapping out the socio-political influences on the micro-level dynamics of prison life. It also implicitly introduces three different realms or lenses through which the empirical Chapters are conceptualised: the material (prison space), procedural (prison regime and regulations), and ideological (premises on which basis systems and people within them interact). These three lenses form a particular perspective for studying imprisonment. However, this chapter, instead of separating these lenses, offers a purposive fusion of these three key elements.

The first section situates this fusion in the context of history. The emergence of the modern prison is followed through the development of two distinct sets of carceral practices namely, ‘cellular confinement’ (Johnston, 2000) and ‘carceral collectivism’ (Piacentini & Slade, 2015). The former is largely associated with the Western organisation of carceral space through separation and isolation whereas the latter has been the preferred method across Eastern European countries<sup>52</sup> (Johnston, 2000) and other parts of the world (see Dirsuweit, 1999; Drake, 2018). By using a historical

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<sup>52</sup> Although paradoxically reforms that take place in the post-Soviet space and the Western world are moving in opposite directions (Piacentini & Slade, 2015); some of the Western approaches seem to welcome ‘the principles of collaboration to take precedence over isolation and individualisation’ (Hancock & Jewkes, 2011, p.619), while the post-Soviet space is experiencing increased pressure to individualise collective living arrangements (Piacentini & Slade, 2015; Slade & Vaičiūnienė, 2018; Vaičiūnienė & Tereškinas, 2017).

approach a better understanding of the current practices and developments in the Latvian prison system can be achieved.<sup>53</sup>

However, regardless of prison spatial arrangements, producing and maintaining prison order is one of the key challenges, which requires some cooperation from prisoners. This implies the prison administration needs to seek a legitimate way of prison organisation and the second section of this chapter investigates this notion. It starts by scrutinising how legitimacy can be operationalised through the framework devised by Liebling assisted by Arnold (2004) on the prison's moral performance as well as the 'new penology' (Feeley & Simon, 1992, p.449), which brings risk thinking and managerialism into the realm of imprisonment (Hannah-Moffat, 2013; Sparks, 1994). The latter part of this section then goes on to consider the cultural heritage of the Latvian prison system, namely 'carceral collectivism', which unavoidably collides with the new trends and practices.

The third, and final section of this Chapter, by linking the physical and regulatory aspects of imprisonment, challenges the traditional notion of a prison being a symbol of immobilisation (Foucault, 1979; Goffman, 1961). It draws upon the view that prisons operate on the premise of the 'mobilitarian ideology' (Mincke, 2016; Mincke, 2017; Mincke & Lemonne, 2014) and that the prison boundary is more fluid and in a constant process of 'becoming', rather than something permanent and fixed (Turner, 2016). This essentially captures the ideological backdrop of imprisonment in times of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000a).

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<sup>53</sup> Knepper and Scicluna (2010, p.408) suggest that this is the criminologist approach towards history as criminologists 'are interested in what has happened in so far as it helps with understanding what is happening'. Moreover, this research follows Mawby's (2007, p.95) view that historical comparisons are as important as cross-national, which combined together 'provide additional insight into the form and function of legal institutions today'.

## 4.1 A Brief History of the Prison and its Architectural Design

Throughout the history of imprisonment, different approaches to punishment have been applied, mainly corresponding to the predominant penal philosophies of the period. Prison as a main means of punishment evolved in Western societies during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Taylor, 1998). Before the 18th century prisons were primarily used for temporary imprisonment for those awaiting trial, physical punishment or execution, and there was no separation of inmates based on their gender, age or type of crimes (McGowen, 1998; Turner, 2016) because imprisonment at the time was ‘an interlude between court appearance and ultimate punishment’ (Johnston, 2000, p.1). The core element of punishment was public display and spectacle, which apart from being a judicial process, was also a political ritual that manifested power (Foucault, 1979). The spectacle of punishment also regulated people’s moral compass by highlighting the consequences of wrongful actions (Turner, 2016) as it was public and physical in nature (Spierenburg, 1984). While both men and women were subjected to brutal corporal punishments ‘the punishment of women was influenced by social constructions of what constituted female ‘decency’’ (Moore & Scraton, 2014, p.2).

However, corporal punishments began to vanish in the 19th century and there have been different accounts on the underlying causes of this change. The liberal account<sup>54</sup> would suggest that the social elites grew increasingly sensitive to people

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<sup>54</sup> There are other accounts, for example, political and economic, which pose a different explanation for the changes in penal practices and the emergence of penal institutions. Those who support the latter suggest that the emergence of penal institutions coincided with the development of factories and they both became the central sites for maintaining capitalist production (see Rusche & Kirchheimer, 1968; Melossi & Pavarini, 1981). Those who align with the former highlight the role of socio-political conditions, which required a new strategy for maintaining a political power; thus the crisis of political legitimacy can be linked to the emergence of penitentiaries (Garland, 1985; Ignatieff, 1978).



suffering during the Enlightenment.<sup>55</sup> Subsequently, public torture was condemned as an ‘atrocious’ and punishment gradually moved away from the public gaze and became ‘the most hidden part of the penal process’ (Foucault, 1979, p.9). Moreover, punishments no longer aimed to torture the body, but the soul, in order to install the new strategy of power – discipline, which was used as a social control mechanism by those in power (Foucault, 1979).

These developments might be perceived as a part of the civilising process (see Elias, 2000), but it is important to remember that this process is not linear and it does not provide any ‘guarantees of civilised outcomes’ (Pratt, 2013, p.93), as there might be backlashes.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, the notion of providing a more humane punishment by the introduction of prisons has been challenged. Initially, many had to endure a harsh prison environment and regime, which were masked under the assumptions of more humane punishment and reform. Thus, more people were sentenced to imprisonment and for a longer period of time ‘on the grounds that rehabilitation took time’ and for many, prison sentences could be considered as more severe than corporal punishment (Rothman, 1995, p.113).

It should also be acknowledged that liberal ideas and their influence on penal measures varied across European countries and globally (Johnston, 2000). The Russian Empire as the ‘empire of the periphery’ (Kagarlitsky, 2008, p.115), lagged behind other

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<sup>55</sup> This allegedly was also the case in the Russian Empire – those were the educated Russians who were behind more liberal penal reforms (see Kriuklyte, 2012).

<sup>56</sup> The holocaust is an example of this (see Bauman, 1989). Similar examples can be drawn from Soviet history - if one compared tsarist and Soviet repression against society in only one year (1918) the Cheka ‘managed to execute more people than the tsarist government had in the previous 300 years’ (Adams, 1996, p.6). Improved planning, efficiency and advancement in technology helped to ‘put into reverse’ the civilising process (Pratt, 2013).

European countries in many aspects, and a programme of ‘liberal’ penal reforms was introduced at a much later date.<sup>57</sup> Suggestions have been made that an important motivation for penal reforms within Russia was the desire to be accepted and perceived as a modern European country, and, essentially, it was shame of the ‘barbarity’ of their country that led to penal reforms (Adams, 1996). Thus, the prison reform movement that originated in Western Europe and America spread to Eastern Europe and other parts of the world (Johnston, 2000). Despite the global reach of the prison reform, it should not be seen as a mere import of the practices and knowledge from the West to the other parts of the world, as ‘specific local ideas and conditions’ need to be considered in a more circular and mutual manner (Dikötter, 2002, p.240).

An increased reliance on imprisonment in Western Europe and America also meant that the design of penitentiaries<sup>58</sup> was scrutinised. From the late 18th century, architects were more likely to be involved in prison design in the West as prisons had to give an appearance that matched the nature and purpose of the institution, which architects referred to as ‘architecture parlante’ (Johnston, 2000). The prison ‘architecture parlante’ played a pivotal role in establishing the visual presence and ‘systems of cultural symbolism’. This rendered prison sites ‘instantly recognisable as places of detention and punishment’ and communicated the retributive power of the state (Moran & Jewkes, 2015, p.173).

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<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, as suggested by Kagarlitsky (2008, p.115) this allowed ‘Russia’s social evolution to follow a qualitatively different trajectory’.

<sup>58</sup> As pointed out by Wener (2012, p.4), a good indication of what prisons and jails were meant to do is to look at the meaning of the word they were referred to, for example, they were called penitentiaries when the aim was ‘to provide for solitary reflection and opportunities for penance’, whereas the use of word correctional institutions would suggest ‘a goal to create change in behaviour, correcting personality and behavioural problems’.

Wener (2012) suggests that prison design should be viewed in relation to the philosophy of the institution, and ostensibly, the criminal justice system as a whole. The design strategies had two parallel aims: the external austere facades were intended to deter people in society from committing crime while the dark, claustrophobic interior and harsh regime were intended to deter prisoners from reoffending (Jewkes & Moran, 2017). For this reason, the Gothic style ‘became established all over the world as *the* style for prisons’ (Johnston, 2000, p.66, emphasis in original). Thus, the state still managed to convey its power and authority over its population and if previously this was exerted through displaying tortured bodies and through punishment as a spectacle, then later prison sites came to symbolise punishment and control (Carlen & Tombs, 2006; Foucault, 1979; Jewkes & Moran, 2017).

However, it should be pointed out that prisons were designed by men for men (Carlen, 2002a), and women inherited prison buildings that were only later adapted for women, as they seemingly failed to deliver the earlier aspirations of ‘encouraging women to develop feelings of femininity and a sense of domestic pride’ (Zedner, 1998, p.304).<sup>59</sup> Thus, gendered notions were embraced through punishment, which enhanced a specific view of ‘womanhood’ and much of it was drawn from middle or upper-class normative ideas (Matthews, 1999). Since the establishment of women’s prisons in the 1800s, penal officials have claimed that women can be empowered by confinement, which in practice has not been the case (Haney, 2010).

New demands and expectations were placed upon prisons, as in contrast to the previous sentencing measures, especially corporal punishment, imprisonment held not

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<sup>59</sup> For example, flowers and music were used in the mid-19th century to ‘mitigate the grim character of the place’ (Zedner, 1998, p.304).

only retributive and deterrent functions, but also embodied a reformative belief (Godfrey & Lawrence, 2015). Ostensibly, the origins of this belief could be traced to Christian monastic establishments in which individual cellular isolation with minimal physical comfort and food supply, was used for punishment in order to ‘encourage spiritual values and provide a corrective for evil thoughts and sinful behaviour, leading ultimately to salvation’ (Johnston, 2000, p.17). Prisons aspired to emulate some of those goals and the prison design was utilised in order to establish specific routines and practices.

During the 19th century two major competing models for prison regimes were developing namely the ‘silent system’<sup>60</sup> and the ‘separate system’<sup>61</sup> - both originated from experiments within two local English prisons, but gained prominence when the two contested models developed in the USA (Zedner, 1998). European countries favoured the ‘separate system’, whereas the USA and Canada preferred the ‘silent system’ (Johnston, 2000). In Europe the ‘silent system’ was deemed to be more difficult to enforce for both male and female offenders, but it was seen, as especially problematic for women as they were perceived as ‘naturally more sociable’ and lacking self-control (Zedner, 1998, p.303).

However, not all countries welcomed these new initiatives. Individual cells that were based on isolation and separation were one of the modernisations that Russians in particular tried to resist. One of the concerns at the time was due to the perceived

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<sup>60</sup> The regime required to work in association, but in silence during the day and solitary confinement at night in single cells (Johnston, 2000). The silent system developed at Auburn (New York) and for this reason the regime is also known as Auburn (Zedner, 1998).

<sup>61</sup> The separate regime was based on solitary confinement and labour in order to achieve self-reflection, remorse and ultimately the moral elevation of the offender (Beijersbergen *et al.*, 2014). It is also known as the Pennsylvanian system, as it developed in Philadelphia (Zedner, 1998).

differences in the prison population; the assumption was that the allegedly better educated criminals in the West had something to think about during the period of isolation, while the Russians could not possibly withstand it and, consequently, it was 'believed that these cells would drive Russians mad rather than correct their behaviour' (Kriukelytė, 2012, p.22). Russians seemed to anticipate that a prolonged use of solitary confinement could cause serious mental health problems as 'mechanised, almost seamless, containment of prisoners' bodies exacerbates or produces extreme state of mind' (Rhodes, 2004, p.29). Krūmiņš and Pokšāns (1996) also suggest that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian Empire had more progressive views than other European states in relation to some aspects of punishment. For example, the death penalty was deemed as inhumane and barbaric due to the fact that it precludes the idea of rehabilitation (although, the so called 'rehabilitation' was achieved through inhumane means). Another seemingly humane gesture by the Russian empire was that it covered the costs of the court proceedings such as avoiding an additional burden and punishment for the families of the accused.

It should be also pointed out that solitary confinement in the Russian context has traditionally been associated with the most severe forms of punishment, which had to be inflicted upon those who were deemed as a threat to the Russian empire (see Kropotkin, 1991).<sup>62</sup> The educated and noble formed the majority of those who threatened the stability of the system and because of their more sophisticated background they were subjected to solitary confinement. As argued by Popova (2016, p.98) one of the defining features was 'the existence of the two separated "ladders of punishment" for the nobility

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<sup>62</sup> This also continued later in the Soviet project (see Aizupe, 1974; Ginzburg, 1967; Solzhenitsyn, 1974; Celmina, 1986).

and everyone else'. Also, as noted by Kennan (1891, cited in Popova, 2016, p.96), noble prisoners were exempt from corporal punishment while serving their sentence.<sup>63</sup> This was based on the social norms and practices instead of legal provisions, as prison doctors routinely exempted them from corporal punishments on the grounds of poor health (Popova, 2016). Piacentini and Pallot (2014, p.22) similarly suggest that higher-ranking prisoners were not subjected to corporal punishment prior to exile, but endured a 'civil death', which implied the loss of civil rights that also extend to their family members who joined them in exile.

However, whether studying imprisonment historically or in present times, men have always been the dominant gender, not only in terms of their numbers, but also in their privileged position. Carlen (1998, p.10) also suggests that women's punishment 'incorporates and amplifies all the anti-social modes of control that oppress women outside the prison' (see also Howe, 1994). Similar arguments have been made by Moore & Scraton (2014), who suggest that prisons reflect gender violence endured by women in a patriarchal society (see also Gelsthorpe & Wright, 2015; Omelchenko, 2016). Since the birth of the modern prison, women have always formed only a small proportion of incarcerated people but they were perceived as 'even more depraved than any criminal men' (Zedner, 1998, p.298), as they were departing from 'traditional feminine ideals' (Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006, p.29). Moreover, women often suffered from worse conditions, as providing accommodation for them seemed to be an afterthought that was 'achieved with the least effort and expense' (Zedner, 1998, p.297). In general, since the

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<sup>63</sup> This seems a common practice across different time periods and in both East and West. As found by Elias (2000, p.163) the evidence from France during the Middle Ages also suggests that 'usually only the poor and lowly, for whom no considerable ransom could be expected, were mutilated, and the knights who commanded ransoms were spared'.

early 19th century the major European powers - England and France attempted to protect 'men from the corrupting influences of female prisoners' and avoid sexual assaults on women, although prisoners still became pregnant by male guards (Zedner, 1998, p.297).

The shift towards separation of prisoners was influenced by the work of the early prison reformists, who were behind attempts to improve prison conditions by providing better food ratios and medical care, hygiene, ventilation and reduction of shared living spaces - mainly to control the outbreaks of contagious illnesses and provide some space for penance (Jewkes & Moran, 2017). Prison reformists also campaigned<sup>64</sup> for the building of prison facilities in such a way that they embodied 'the philosophy of reformation rather than retribution' (Jewkes & Moran, 2017, p.545). While this was the case in some of the 'more enlightened' countries in Europe and America, the Russian Empire was not in a hurry to change its 'in exile' imprisonment strategies<sup>65</sup> nor to build modern prisons. The first modern prisons appeared a century after the first 'modern' penitentiaries were built in the West; meanwhile Russians used barrack-like holding facilities, which were not particularly tailored for meeting the demands of the modern prison (Kriukelytė, 2012; see also Popova, 2016). Johnston (2000) would refer to this practice as opportunistic due to the fact that already existing

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<sup>64</sup> John Howard and Elizabeth Fry in the UK context and John Haviland in the USA (Johnstone, 2000), however it can be argued that Howard underpinned changes in penal institution designs globally (Jewkes & Moran, 2017).

<sup>65</sup> It was in the 15th century when penal servitude and 'exile to district lands made their appearance' (Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012, p.3). Siberia became particularly popular destination in the 18th century after discovering its mineral wealth (coal, iron, timber) and in order to arrive there prisoners were expected to walk for thousands of miles (Johnston, 2000). Prisoners until the late 19th century were expected to walk to the hard-labour colonies, which could take up to two years and half (5200 miles) and many did not survive the journey (Kropotkin, 1991). 'In exile' imprisonment served not only as a strategy of punishment, but also as an instrument of colonisation and a way of addressing the needs of the state (Pallot, 2015; Popova, 2016).

structures, which were built for different purposes, were adapted to prison needs. The conditions in Russian prisons remained 'extremely primitive and frequently the only warmth was provided by the body heat of the large number of people crowded into the buildings' (Johnston, 2000, p.126); perhaps this is one of the most pragmatic explanations of 'carceral collectivism'.

At the same time, in the West, the shift towards separation proved to be more challenging in practical terms, as building individual cells meant more costs and if cells were built, often their walls were too thin to prevent communication (Zedner, 1998). Nevertheless, one of the most influential prisons by design, which reinforced and strengthened the separate system, was Bentham's envisaged panopticon.<sup>66</sup> The whole concept was based on the idea that the architectural design of the prison building would allow maximisation of 'the visibility of inmates who were to be isolated in individual cells, such that they were unaware moment-to-moment whether they were being observed by guards in a central tower' (Haggerty & Ericson, 2000, p.607). As Foucault has suggested the major effect of the panopticon was 'to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power', and thus Bentham laid foundations to the principle that 'power should be visible and unverifiable' (Foucault, 1979, p.201). Even if this was based on deception (no guard could monitor every single cell at the same time) it placed each prisoner under pressure, as they could potentially be observed at any given time, but were unaware of when this could happen, thus becoming 'the object of information, never a subject in communication' (Foucault, 1979, p.200).

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<sup>66</sup> Johnston (2000) is more critically assessing the role of panopticon pointing out that very few prisons have been built according to the envisaged Bentham's plan and none in his lifetime.



The radial design was the prevailing style of prison architecture in Europe in the second half of the 19th century and was ostensibly influenced by Bentham's panopticon (Beijersbergen *et al.*, 2014). The radial prison design<sup>67</sup> served its purpose: 'strict isolation, hard labour and moral introspection as a means of reform and salvation, combined with total ease of supervision and control by a minimum of staff' (Dunbar & Fairweather, 2000, p.30). While there was not such an overall trend in the Russian Empire,<sup>68</sup> due to practical implications, such as severe lack of funds and the application of transportation or the 'in exile' imprisonment (see Johnston, 2000; Pallot, 2005; Piacentini & Pallot, 2014; Popova, 2016), as well as cultural attachment to 'carceral collectivism' (see Piacentini & Slade, 2015).

Moreover, it should be pointed out that it was not prison that sought to reform prisoners in the Imperial Russian, but the hard and productive work,<sup>69</sup> which was seen as part of rehabilitation (Pallot, 2015; Piacentini, 2004a). If prisoners were not sent to Siberia they were employed in 'work companies' (Kriukelytė, 2012), thus for centuries Russians have exploited prisoner bodies 'as a unique form of human capital' (Turner, 2016, p.75). When the mandatory penal labour was officially introduced in 1886, it was significantly reconceptualised and rebranded as 'rehabilitative', as part of attempts 'to

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<sup>67</sup> The main features of the radial design include the radial layout of the buildings in a cross or a double cross shape with a central vantage point from which guards could oversee and visually inspect the wings (Beijersbergen *et al.*, 2014).

<sup>68</sup> There were some exemplary prisons, for example, the Saint Petersburg prison in the late 19th century 'served as a laboratory of the penological innovation' as it was the first prison in the Imperial Russia, which introduced night-time separation and paid prison labour for common prisoners (Popova, 2016, p.101).

<sup>69</sup> Although until the late 19th century penal labour also known as *katorga* was mainly perceived as a form of punishment. It implied extremely hard physical labour without any remuneration and in appalling and dangerous conditions while being locked in shackles (Popova, 2016).

develop the rational bureaucratic governance’ (Popova, 2016, p.100). As further elaborated by Popova (2016, p.102):

‘the remuneration of convict labour marks the rupture with the other type of forced convict labour, the *katorga*. It reflects the ideal of rehabilitation of convicts through labour and the compelling ideal of the industrial wage labour: performing labour and receiving remuneration for it, according to the GTU officials, not only disciplined the prisoners within the prison walls, but also facilitated an easier reintegration into society after the release.’<sup>70</sup>

This approach towards prison work continues and currently impacts the way ‘rehabilitation’ is perceived in many of the post-Soviet countries (see Haney, 2010; Krupnik, 2019), including Latvia (see Chapter 7 section 7.3). Haney’s (2010, p.79) research into Hungarian women’s prison, for example, evidenced that prison staff were sentimental about times when the prison system could ensure full employment and held the belief that ‘rehabilitation’ is about ‘the process through which inmates would become reintegrated into the institutions of work and family’.

The idea of inmate reform and rehabilitation has almost universally remained as one of the official objectives of imprisonment as it ostensibly provides ‘a legitimising philosophy to the correctional enterprise’ (Cullen and Gilbert, 1982, cited in Colvin, 1992, p.3). However, even though it is frequently stated as one of the official objectives, significant contradictions can be seen ‘between what the institution does and what its officials must say it does’ (Goffman, 1961, p.73).

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<sup>70</sup> GTU (Glavnoe Tiuremnoe Upravlenie) stands for the Main Prison Administration (Popova, 2016).

## **4.2 Prison Order and Legitimacy: from the ‘New Penology’ in the West to ‘Carceral Collectivism’ in the East**

Whatever the prison spatial organisation might be, producing and maintaining order is one of the perennial problems that requires ‘a continual process of ‘working at it’’ (Sparks, Bottoms & Hay, 1996, p.2). As pointed out by Fitzgerald and Sim (1982, p.26) ‘social order does not just happen: it is constantly in the process of being constructed, legitimated, supported and challenged’ and it is worth noting that maintaining order is one of the commonly shared interests of prisoners and staff (Sparks, Bottoms & Hay, 1996; Sykes, 1958).

Order and compliance with the prison rules cannot be achieved by purely coercive means (Colvin, 1992; Sykes, 1958); thus, the prison administration need to ‘seek legitimation from prisoners’ (Sparks & Bottoms, 1995, p.58), which in essence implies a justified way of exercising power over other people. As suggested by Beetham (1991, p.11) all systems, which involve power relations seek legitimacy and ‘a given power relationship is not legitimate because people believe in its legitimacy, but because it can be justified in terms of their belief’. This definition, as pointed out by Sparks and Bottoms (1995), injects a moral judgement in the concept of legitimacy. Liebling’s assisted by Arnold (2004, xviii) framework of the prison’s ‘moral performance’ in particular reflects this notion, as it not only operationalises legitimacy in its traditional sense of ‘order, fairness and authority’, but also incorporates dimensions outside the official power relations such as ‘trust, respect and well-being’.

### **4.2.1 The Moral Performance of the Prison: Legitimacy through Interpersonal Relationships and Authority**

Arguably all prison systems do have a legitimacy deficit ‘especially from the vantage points of the confined’ (Sparks, 1994, p.26), but there can be different severity levels as some prisons can be more humane - with higher procedural justice and efficiency and better staff-prisoner relations (Bierie, 2013; Liebling, 1999). These aspects need to be considered when addressing the inherent issue of legitimacy (Bierie, 2013) and the ‘underlying conflict between the keepers and captives’ (Colvin, 1992, p.207).

The framework devised by Liebling assisted by Arnold (2004, p.475) on prison’s ‘moral performance’ is essential in order to capture not only how legitimacy is operationalised, but also how such questions as psychological well-being, personal development, and interpersonal treatment, which are not ‘fully explained by or conditional upon power relations’ can be an integral part of understanding the experience of imprisonment. However, this subsection draws only on specific elements of the prisons’ ‘moral performance’, namely the relationship dimension and the use of authority (see Liebling, 2011b; Liebling, 2011a; Liebling, Arnold & Straub, 2011).<sup>71</sup>

As suggested by Liebling (1999, p.147) there is a distinction between prisons as some have ‘more legitimate regimes than others’. Therefore, prisons at times should be viewed as singular units as despite the common legal base and ostensibly shared prison functions, the moral quality of life differs inside custodial institutions and some prisons can be ‘more survivable than others’ (Liebling, 2011a, p.530). According to Liebling

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<sup>71</sup> Liebling assisted by Arnold (2004) established several other dimensions that should be measured in order to establish the prisons’ ‘moral performance’ such as ‘regime dimension’ and ‘quality of life’, but these (and other dimensions) will not be discussed in this section.

(2011a, p.532) this difference emerges from ‘the domain of interpersonal relationships and treatment, and the use of authority’. The importance of staff-prisoner relationships and humane treatment should be highlighted as suggested by Liebling, Price and Shefer (2011, p.103):

‘Through relationships, prisoners (and officers) became individuals. Officers and prisoners sometimes knew truths about each other which others did not know... Staff could use this information to deploy their authority more wisely and carefully with the complexities of their population in mind.’

This is particularly important to prison officers who have to transmit their power through direct face-to-face encounters, as they do not enjoy ‘an impersonal bureaucracy’ through which to enforce rules and regulations (Liebling, 2011b, p.488). Liebling (2009, p.19) has pointed out that staff-prisoner relationships are central to the prison system as ‘each interaction with a member of staff is in a significant way representative of the relationship between the prisoner and the prison as an institution’. There can be different strategies applied for creating good relationships between staff and prisoners. Liebling (2014a) suggests the use of ‘dynamic authority’, which is based upon several key features such as: knowing prisoners well, deploying authority through relationships, adapting to different personalities of prisoners and applying individualised approaches, as well as holding back power and encouraging prisoners to be cooperative rather than coerced (see also Liebling, 2011b).

The use of ‘dynamic authority’ can be referred to as the ‘holy grail of prison management’, as it contributes towards the establishment of the ideal type of system, which can be characterised as ‘light-present’ (Crewe *et al.*, 2014a, p.404). This implies that prison officers resort to relational solutions for achieving outcomes actively, but unobtrusively without formal punishments, as dynamic authority ‘takes effect prior to

disciplinary action, and thereby obviates its necessity' (Crewe *et al.*, 2014a, p.404). Liebling, Price and Shefer (2011) have found that in the wings with distant and difficult staff-prisoner relationships, the removal of privileges occurred more frequently. In contrast, good staff-prisoner relationships facilitated more informal ways of punishment that did not follow formal procedures. Similarly, as argued by Sparks, Bottoms and Hay (1996, p.155), 'the good prison officer will bend the rules for good reasons, for the right reasons', but there is a fine line between establishing the 'right' relationships (Liebling, 2008; 2011b) and a behaviour that might be perceived as unfair treatment by others. Thus, the use of 'dynamic authority' can be seen as an integral part of staff 'professionalism', which as suggested by Crewe, Liebling and Hulley (2011), seems to be one of the positive aspects of the traditional prison staff culture.<sup>72</sup>

Prisoners tend to expect professionalism from staff that entails 'maintaining a correct and fair posture irrespective of private feelings' (Sparks, Bottoms & Hay, 1996, p.209). Thus, prison staff faces a difficult challenge of being fair and consistent throughout their work and communication with prisoners, or as argued by Liebling, Price and Shefer (2011, p.108) prison work requires 'flexibility within a framework of consistency'. Nevertheless, what matters to prisoners is whether they are treated with humanity, respect and decency. These are core values, which should be reflected within interpersonal relationships, which would also contribute towards the prisons' 'moral performance' and its legitimacy (Auty & Liebling, 2019).

However, the relationships that prison staff and prisoners build cannot be divorced from the wider socio-political currents that circumscribe behaviour and

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<sup>72</sup> See also Liebling, Arnold & Straub (2011, p.144) in their survey they found that uniformed staff relied on the 'dynamic authority' to greater extent than non-uniformed staff.

regulate relationships that develop inside prison walls. For this reason, the next section exposes the influence of the ‘new penology’ and how it affects relationships that develop inside. In many respects the ‘new penology’ is the trajectory for many of the post-Soviet states, including Latvia as ‘the dominant culture and the power structure upon which it rests’ (Garland 2001, p.25) shifts ever deeper into neoliberalism.

#### **4.2.2 The New Penology**

Prisons and their internal life by and large should be seen as a reflection of the state and the society at large (Jacobs, 1977); thus, prisons as institutions cannot be divorced from the wider context of the state and its policies. In the early 90’s Feeley and Simon (1992, p.449) conceptualised the ‘new penology’ as that which increasingly relies on merging ‘concerns for surveillance and custody’ and managing ‘dangerous groups’. As Liebling and Crewe (2013, p.284) have summarised from the work of Feeley and Simon, the new penology is ‘risk-focused, distant, quantitative, rational, control-oriented and treated offenders as units to be managed rather than moral agents with futures’. Garland (2001, p.199) suggests that imprisonment ‘serves as an expressive satisfaction of retributive sentiments and an instrumental mechanism for the management of risk and the confinement of danger’. This has been further supported by Hannah-Moffat’s (2013) observations that current practices involve managing a ‘risk society’, where offenders are divided into risk categories and managed accordingly with the final objective being ‘to transform risky subjects to make them less risky’ (Maurutto & Hannah-Moffat, 2006, p.446).

The managerial climate and the shrinking public budget under neoliberalism places prison administration under increasing pressure to achieve more with a greater number of prisoners but with fewer resources as well as facing greater competition from private sector service providers in meeting targets, therefore trade-offs are often inevitable (Crewe, 2009). The previous therapeutic discourses have been replaced with surveillance, containment, security and control. In addition, the new penology has served as ‘the rationale for building bigger and cheaper prisons’ (Jewkes & Moran, 2017, p.549). Nevertheless, these pressures are somewhat different for female and male penal estates. If pressure for bigger or ‘supermax’ facilities are especially prevalent for the male estate (Jewkes & Moran, 2017; King, 1999), then for women the recurring issue is that fewer prison facilities are available (Carlen & Worrall, 2004), which means they are located further away from their homes.

The new penology has also reshaped pains of imprisonment or as reconceptualised by Crewe (2011a, p.510), the ‘depth’, ‘weight’ and ‘tightness’ or the so-called ‘burdens of modern imprisonment’. According to Crewe (2011a, p.522) prisoners experience greater tightness, and this has become fundamental for understanding the experience of incarceration as it encapsulates:

‘the way that power operates both closely and anonymously, working like an invisible harness on the self. It is all-encompassing and invasive, in that it promotes the self-regulation of all aspects of conduct, addressing both the psyche and the body.’

Penal power is seemingly becoming ‘softer’, as it no longer relies on authoritarian practices, which clearly displayed the coercive power of the institution; instead it operates on premises of responsabilising prisoners through a compliance project (Liebling assisted by Arnolds, 2004). Prisoners are ‘required to demonstrate an active



commitment to change and to engage with the system as enthusiastic partners in project', otherwise they can be further sanctioned (Crewe, 2009, p.140). Participatory logic ensures that prisoners are accountable for engaging with provided activities to reduce their risk of reoffending and harm. Thus, it can be argued that the rehabilitation process has become an individual rather than institutional responsibility (Crewe, 2009; Kendall, 2002; Kruttschnitt & Gartner, 2005; Liebling, 2011a). For instance, if the prison system offers courses and activities, the assumption is that prisoners need to attend and show willingness to change. The personal transformation is achieved through individualised work on self, which effectively leads women to view their imprisonment 'as a personal journey devoid of collective significance' (Haney, 2010, p.75).

Moreover, women prisoners are particularly constrained by the available courses and activities, which are constructed and delivered within the discourse of femininity, placing emphasis on how women 'ought' to behave within a cultural context, with interventions being made to coerce or persuade 'women to reintegrate into a recognisably 'feminine' form' (Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2009, p.700). Traditional gender roles and 'appropriate' behaviour can be embraced through the range of courses, activities and work opportunities in prison (Bosworth, 1999; Britton, 2011; Moore & Scraton, 2014; Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2009). Haney (2010, p.93) also suggests that women are indoctrinated into consumer culture by 'training inmates to relate their desires more closely to capitalist patterns of consumption'. This reflects the broader neoliberal framework, which shapes citizens into 'individual entrepreneurs and consumers whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for "self-care"- their ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions' (Brown, 2006, p.694).

Carlen (2002b, p.116) has pointed out a real danger of the punitive function of the prison being veiled with claims that imprisonment, especially women's, is or potentially can be not only for punishment, but also 'for psychological readjustment, training in parenting, drugs rehabilitation, general education or whatever else the 'programmers' of the day might deem to be lacking in a prisoner's life'. However, this claim that prison can serve as 'an instrument of beneficence to prisoners' can misguide people and trap them into 'forgetting that the main function of prison is the delivery of pain' (Carlen, 2002b, p.116). Moreover, by ameliorating prison conditions for women one might 'add to the attraction of prison as a suitable sentence for women' (Gelsthorpe, 2010, p.381).

However, it is not only important to draw the current trajectory for penal developments, but also take into account history and culture (Garland, 1990; Nelken, 2010), which in the post-Soviet space is rooted in the 'carceral collectivism' that for centuries stood in opposition to Western penal practices (Piacentini & Slade, 2015).

#### **4.2.3 'Carceral Collectivism'**

Prisons can be seen as 'repositories of a unique cultural relationship' between the prison and state and equally that of people and the state (Piacentini, 2015, p.81), and this cultural expression can reveal the material logic of social control (Garland, 1990). First and foremost, what distinguishes the post-Soviet region from the West is the social attachment to 'carceral collectivism', which, as argued by Piacentini and Slade (2015), embodies three vital characteristics: penal governance that stems from peer surveillance,

a communal dormitory type living and prisoners being equipped with diffused authority and governance.

Even if ‘carceral collectivism’ predates the Soviet rule, it was the Soviet project, which carved this practice into a scientific method with ideological underpinnings that to some extent helped to rationalise and legitimise penal regimes. ‘Carceral collectivism’ was not only a natural continuity of historically well-established practices (see Popova, 2016) but also an expression of the communist ideology through a focus on the collective or, as suggested by Holquist (2003, p.32), the portrayal of an idealised image of ‘the People-as-One’.

‘Carceral collectivism’ was turned into a scientific method at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Makarenko<sup>73</sup> who proposed to organise prisoners into self-managed collectives. This implied limited direct contact with prison staff, as the ‘active’ prisoners managed the ‘passive’ (Vavokhine, 2004). This approach led to the creation of a hierarchial system inside prisons, which ensured that common criminals could rise to the highest positions as political prisoners could not be trusted (see Celmina, 1986; Vavokhine, 2004; Aizupe, 1974). Thus, common criminals were better placed among prisoner hierarchies and this allowed them to exploit other inmates (Pallot & Katz, 2017; Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012; Vavokhine, 2004).<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Anton Makarenko from 1920 to 1934 was in charge of camps for juvenile offenders and orphans where he experimented with his grand vision of self-managed collectives and established grounds for collective pedagogy that ostensibly had a lasting influence on the way penal institutions were managed during the Soviet times and beyond (Vavokhine, 2004).

<sup>74</sup> Different groups or ‘castes’ developed throughout time corresponding to applied strategies by the prison administration and internal schisms. The first major schism among prisoner hierarchies appeared after the Second World War (see Vavokhine, 2004).

The emergence of the informal inmate code ‘thieves-in-law’<sup>75</sup> (*vory v zakone*) is also associated with this self-managed hierarchical prison community model. Despite utterly inhumane conditions and treatment in the Soviet gulag camps, inmates managed to establish their informal rules and mechanisms that circumvented the official authority, which is in line with Bosworth (1999, p.130) argument that ‘resistance, like power, is everywhere’. At the same time, it could be argued that this self-managed hierarchical prison community model served the interests of the prison authorities as it helped to legitimise the Soviet inhumane imprisonment, as essentially prisoners themselves organised internal life by establishing their own rules, which were needed for survival.

However, in relation to women’s imprisonment, there is no consensus about how the ‘thieves-in-law’ operated and whether women followed similar rules and patterns as this area has been under researched (Galeotti, 2018). Nevertheless, due to the identical prison management style, it can be argued that similar hierarchical-relationships also developed among women within barrack-style living arrangements. Aizupe, a Latvian female political prisoner during the 1940s and 1950s, recounted that some of the ‘thieves-in-law’ practices were enforced in the women’s prison, for example, the ‘communal fund’ or the so-called ‘obshchak’. Women who received food parcels were approached by those in positions of authority or ‘thieves-in-law’ to ensure that they were making an appropriate contribution to the ‘communal fund’. If some tried to evade this practice, they risked losing it all as hidden items would be found and removed leaving the legitimate owner empty handed. Those who were willing to adhere to the

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<sup>75</sup> It was an informal code of conduct, which developed within gulag camps (although a precise date of the emergence of the code can be disputed); it imposed many rules and regulations predominantly for men, but for the purpose of this work there will be no detailed discussion of those rules, however, it is worth pointing out that one of the rules was not to work, which is rather paradoxical considering the context of the Soviet gulag camps (see Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012; Vavokhine, 2004; Oleinik, 2003).

redistributive practices were left with a share of their goods (Aizupe, 1974). Thus, women, similar to men, were forming self-managed collectives; this practice has continued after the breakdown of the Soviet project and women arriving at a penal institution still experience that ‘every person has her own place’ (Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012, p.207). Pallot and Piacentini assisted by Moran (2012, p.108) also highlighted the practice of self-governance, as life inside women’s prison is still organised through a prisoner - ‘head prefect’, who serves as ‘the principal point of contact between prisoners and the authorities’.

Several accounts of women who survived Soviet imprisonment also suggest that women prisoners were less exploitative of each other and more cohesive in mitigating the Soviet inhumane regime and severe deprivations. Women were likely to assist one another, for example, as recalled by Celmina (1986) before she was sent to Siberia, women on remand in prison gathered and gave away things that they thought she would need to survive the journey to, and life in, Siberia (see also Aizupe, 1974; Ginzburg, 1967). Thus, women prisoners seemed to mirror the promoted Soviet values of community and solidarity within the prison context. Although institutionalised informing was embedded within the Soviet system (see Aizupe, 1974; Celmina, 1986; Solzhenitsyn, 1974) and, as argued by Los (2002, p.27), Soviet just like other totalitarian states applied an enhanced version of panopticon or mutual surveillance techniques in which each person could be viewed as ‘a potential policeman for others, a secret eye of the system’. Consequently, there was no need to build a panopticon – people served this purpose.

These principles seem to have had a lasting influence on prison organisation within the post-Soviet space in which multiple levels of control are produced,

negotiated and imposed by the prison system and prisoners themselves. The reliance on polyopticon, which means ‘formalised enlistment of informants and informal co-optation of authoritative prisoners’ (Piacentini & Slade, 2015, p.184), can be beneficial for both prisoners and staff. Leaking information about prison life can ensure better treatment by prison staff and prison research has shown in other jurisdictions, that ‘ratting’ appears at higher levels within women’s prisons, which is related to the ‘relative lack of economic bargaining power’ (Ward, 1970, cited in Bierende, 2013, p.20).

The dispersal of authority and governance has also been highlighted by researchers of the post-Soviet space (Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012; Piacentini & Slade, 2015; Slade, 2015; Slade & Vaičiūnienė, 2018). The prison system still relies on a significant co-governance, but as in other parts of the world in which prison order is co-produced, this ‘collective’ organisation steps in ‘to occupy historical voids in state responsibility and governance’ (Drake, 2018, p.10). The collective governance also does not necessarily lead to prisons becoming more disorderly or violent places, as internal codes ensure ‘the stability of the social order in penal institutions’ (Pallot & Katz, 2017, p.81). In fact, as argued by Skarbek (2012), self-governing prison communities use internally devised norms in order to protect themselves and create a safer and more predictable environment (see also Symkovych, 2017). Thus, prisoners are more involved in ‘order production’ and officers depend on prisoner collaboration to run everyday prison life - maintaining order and discipline (Drake & Harvey, 2013; Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012; Piacentini & Slade, 2015), which also imply a shared responsibility for attaining legitimacy. In addition, this kind of order production can also contribute towards delivering ‘justice’. Findings from Russia suggest that there might be an assumption that ‘the rigid social

ordering that the illicit hierarchies impose upon the whole prison body, delivers a more just punishment to transgressors against the broader social order than does the criminal-justice system' (Pallot & Katz, 2017, p.82).

The boundary of prison as an institution can become particularly blurred in 'carceral collectivism'. This leads to a broader debate in the last section of this Chapter about the prison boundaries, which can be seen as meeting the requirements of 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000b; Bauman, 2013) and its constantly shifting realities.

#### **4.3 The Prison and its Boundaries: the Changing Nature of Imprisonment and the 'Mobilitarian Ideology'**

Traditionally prisons have been referred to as 'closed' institutions (Davies, 2011) in which all aspects of life become regulated and controlled. One of the central features of prison life is a daily regime 'which provides a regular programme of activities and a semblance of structure and order to the day' (Matthews, 1999, p.41). Goffman (1961, p.15) referred to a prison as a 'total institution' in which the total character is expressed via establishing 'the barrier to social intercourse with the outside' world as well as ensuring additional barriers and segregation within the institution.

However, the hermetic enclosure or Goffman's (1961) concept of the total institution has been challenged as the division between the 'inside' and 'outside', represented by the so-called prison boundary, is rather more fluid and in a constant process of 'becoming' instead of something permanent and fixed (Moran, Piacentini & Pallot, 2013; Turner, 2016). Turner (2016, p.6, emphasis in original) also suggests that the inside/outside boundary is constituted by '*a set of connections* that work to construct,

reinforce and transgress that boundary’, which essentially challenge the traditional and binary distinction between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’. This is due to the fact that the socio political and economic processes undermine ‘any simple distinction between the “carceral inside” and the “public outside”’ (Turner, 2014, p.321). The binary distinction between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ has been challenged also by Baer and Ravneberg (2008, p.214) who applied the Foucauldian concept of heterotopia arguing that prison should be seen as a heterotopic space ‘outside of and different from other spaces, but still inside the general social order’.

Moreover, links to the wider society are reinforced by the ‘mobilitarian ideology’. The emerging ‘mobilitarian ideology’ within the society has been transposed into prison, where mobility is used for achieving legitimacy, as immobility leads to ‘a desynchronisation with the society’ (Mincke, 2017, p.245). The internal mobility is promoted by the prison regime, which provides incentives and privileges for abiding by the prison rules.<sup>76</sup> Individuals are provided with incentives and rewards for good behaviour, thus an active appeal to self-interest binds prisoner desires to institutional ambitions (Crewe, 2009). This practice also establishes that a good prisoner should be mobile and in progression (Mincke & Lemonne, 2014). Therefore, it can be argued that a prison is no longer a symbol of immobilisation, but a place, which relies on constant mobilisation technique applications and a place in which ‘being a prisoner is no longer a state but a path’ (Mincke, 2016, p.26).

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<sup>76</sup> A long-standing history of this approach needs to be recognised – it originated during the 19th century as it was deemed that by incorporating a reward system ‘positive and socially acceptable characteristics such as diligence and obedience’ could be promoted (Taylor, 1998, p.147).



However, this symbolic and practical mobility also makes it harder to navigate this path as boundaries become blurred. If previously authoritarian regimes allegedly interfered little in prisoner lives, drawing on clear rules and boundaries and making little trouble if the order was observed, then currently boundaries are blurred and expectations unclear. Late-modern prisons can be characterised as ‘dishonest and manipulative’ and ‘the system repeatedly raises hopes without always providing clear criteria for how these could be met’ (Crewe, 2007, p.263). The complexity of prisoner-staff relations has increased providing a sharp contrast to the oppressive authoritarian prison of past that was more predictable; currently there are more ‘difficulties of knowing the precise limits of acceptable conduct with staff’(Crewe, 2009, p.109) and setting boundaries might have become a much more fluid and dynamic process.

The negotiation of the ‘internal’ boundaries among prisoners also takes place on a day-to-day basis. This is a particularly pertinent aspect within the tradition of ‘carceral collectivism’ in which the carceral space is continually shared, contested and re-negotiated (Piacentini & Slade, 2015). However, the loss of privacy is inevitable in all types of prisons, as to become a prisoner implies placing personal privacy in the hands of authorities (Wener, 2012), or as Goffman (1961, p.31) argues, entering a prison facility can mean a ‘mortification of self’. Prison space becomes a site of ‘the embodiment of carceral power’ (Balfour, 2018, p.150) as prisoner’s personal boundaries can be easily transgressed by prison staff (Balfour, 2018; Edney, 1997) or other prisoners (Colvin, 1992; Crewe, 2009; Pallot, 2007). Goffman (1961) argues territories of the ‘self’ become violated by disclosure of past behaviour and discreditable facts, which are collected and available to staff members.

Nevertheless, prisoners tend to develop coping mechanisms in order to maintain some level of control. As suggested by Sibley and van Hoven (2009, p.198) one of the coping mechanisms for prisoners is to produce space, which means personalising cells and creating ‘some semblance of home’. This, as argued by Sibley and Van Hoven (2009, p.199), challenges Foucault’s claims of transparent space and prisons’ capacity to produce ‘docile bodies’ (see Foucault, 1979), as prison space both material and imaginary can remain ‘unseen and not susceptible to regulations by the regime’.

In addition, Crewe *et al.* (2014b, p.56) have argued that ‘prisons have a distinctive kind of emotional geography, with zones in which certain kinds of emotional feelings and displays are more or less acceptable’. This applies to both prison staff and prisoners (Crewe *et al.*, 2014b), as the former have to manage not only their emotions, but also the frustration and anger expressed by prisoners (see Crawley, 2004b), whereas the latter tend to be aware of the ‘bureaucratic gaze’ under which her or his actions and attitudes are being judged (Crewe *et al.*, 2014b). Emotions usually are held back in public, whereas cells are supposed to be ‘private’ where prisoners could be themselves, yet many have to share their cells and there is no space for solitude (Wener, 2012). As found by Crewe *et al.* (2017) many women found this kind of situation overwhelming and suffocating due to the absence of emotional privacy. This is a particular pertinent issue within ‘carceral collectivism’ as the spatial design precludes solitude and denies women privacy (Pallot, 2007).<sup>77</sup>

The emotional geography of life ‘inside’ tends to be a complex matter across different jurisdictions and among women and men prisoners, as the involuntary stay is

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<sup>77</sup> This does not necessarily apply just to the tradition of ‘carceral collectivism’ but also to Western penal institutions due to budget constraints and rising prison populations that lead to overcrowding.

accompanied by feelings of insecurity, loneliness and mistrust (Crewe *et al.*, 2014b; Katz & Pallot, 2014). This can be mitigated by interaction with people from ‘outside’, which removes prisoners from the prison reality (Moran, 2013a; Turner, 2016). By talking to ‘outsiders’ prisoners might ‘feel a bit closer to home, a bit more like a human being and a bit less like a prisoner’ (Bosworth *et al.*, 2005, p.257).

There are further ‘escape’ territories, such as ‘workshops’, in which even if many people attend, by concentrating on the work, they can experience some kind of solitude (Milhaud & Moran, 2013). Moran (2013a) has also referred to prison visiting facilities as ‘liminal carceral spaces’ as they do not follow either prison or the outside rules – they are in-between both worlds and systems. But ultimately it should be pointed out that the human body itself can be seen as a ‘politically inscribed entity’ (Bordo, 2003, p.21) and the carrier of the prison boundary (Turner, 2016). Thus, the prison boundary has an incredible flexibility as it can expand when people are released. It does not end at the prison gates but is carried further by the bodies of the released individuals (Turner, 2016) and carceral spaces beyond prison walls (Allspach, 2010).

In conclusion, this Chapter has focused on the different approaches to imprisonment taken by Eastern and Western European countries; in particular, regarding the use of prison space and the regimes for exercising power and control. While in the West efforts have been made towards building prisons and establishing regimes that can fulfil the publicly declared aims of imprisonment and, thus, achieve legitimacy, Russian penal system for centuries has been based on the use of hard labour and in exile imprisonment and hierarchical power, which aimed at dislodging any resistance towards the established ruling regime. Historically, the Russian prison system

has exploited prisoner bodies ‘as a unique form of human capital’ (Turner, 2016, p.75) as hard and productive work symbolised prisoner successful ‘rehabilitation’.

The attachment to ‘carceral collectivism’ seems to be a logical continuation of cultural practices, which have outlived different political systems from autocracy to the Soviet regime and current ‘democracies’ throughout the post-Soviet space. This is due to the mode of governance and power structures which, regardless of the ‘type’ of political system, remained hierarchical, and as prisons reflect the state and the society at large (Jacobs 1977), the hierarchical mode of governance through ‘carceral collectivism’ remains in place. Moreover, ‘carceral collectivism’ not only embodies the hierarchical structures, but also serves the purpose of covering the voids of the ruling power in providing sufficient means for maintaining penal institutions (see Drake, 2018). Women prisoners, in particular, seemed to be less exploitative and more cohesive in mitigating the Soviet inhumane regime and severe deprivations (see Celmina, 1986; Ginzburg, 1967). Moreover, co-governance or co-produced prison order also leads to increasingly blurred boundaries between prison staff and prisoners, thus even legitimacy of the prison consists of shared and negotiated effort. Nevertheless, while boundaries might have become more uncertain inside (Crewe, 2009), the prison boundary becomes inevitable after enduring the prison sentence, as it remains attached to the bodies of the released individuals (Turner, 2016).

While many micro aspects of imprisonment become shared by all prisoners regardless of gender, women prisoners tend to have additional burdens. Due to the fact that women throughout the history of imprisonment have composed a relatively small proportion of the whole prison population, they had to endure worse prison conditions as this was delivered ‘with the least effort and expense’ (Zedner, 1998, p.297). This

allegedly continues as the pressing needs of the majority (men) are more likely to be addressed than the needs of a small, dispersed and marginalised penal population, which is represented by women. Thus, gender shaped the earliest prison regimes and it continues shaping the current descendants (Britton, 2011). The empirical chapters will provide further insights into this and other aspects of women's imprisonment in Latvia, under the devised research framework, but prior to that, the next chapter discusses research methodology, which unravels the complicated nature of prison research and its ontological and epistemological foundation.

## **Chapter 5 Research Design and Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This Chapter aims at establishing the ontological and epistemological foundations of this study as well as detailing methodological choices and the practical implications for the selected approaches. This Chapter also describes the research methods and strategies employed for entering the field, the data collection process and analysis as well as the limitations that have emerged.

This study of how the Latvian penal system is adapting and positioning itself in a wider socio-political context of neoliberalism and how women's imprisonment has been affected by the interplay between the Soviet legacy and the neoliberal agenda is grounded in a reflexive-realist ontology. This implies reconciliation of realism with interpretivism and relativism (O'Reilly, 2009). A reflexive-realist position aims at overcoming the rigidity of realism and endless interpretivism of relativism (O'Reilly, 2009, cited in Hall, 2018, p.393). For the purpose of this thesis, realism and the 'objective reality' are operationalised by two elements: firstly, by the physical environment and human built structures such as the prison; and secondly, by socio-political processes and ideological forces.

As a researcher, I seek to focus on the multiple realities and myriad of experiences, which people construct while living in the real world. By acknowledging that the material reality exists independently of human social constructions, 'ontological vandalism' (Sayer, 1997, p.477) is being avoided. Moreover, it is not only the external physical or material world that shapes human experiences and sense of reality but also

socio-political processes and ideological forces (see Gilmore, 1990), which can be either intrinsic or extrinsic to individuals. Ideological forces can be internalised and reflect day-to-day practices, which for the purpose of this research is of paramount importance as the question of what becomes internalised and how social practices change in response to the ideological forces lies at the heart of this research. In order to unravel this complex question, an interpretivist epistemology has been applied, which is based on the Weberian principle of *verstehen* and the interpretive nature of understanding social actions (Scott, 2017). Interpretivists seek to discover ‘culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social lifeworld’ (Crotty, 1998, p.67) and usually no attempts are being made to change the world by providing recommendations or action plans, as it is more about providing a deep and faithful account of the human being, their actions and experiences (see O'Reilly, 2009). Similarly, my intentions were to be part of human experiences in the carceral space in order to provide a deep, faithful, reflexive and theoretically informed account of life inside the prison.

In line with an interpretivist epistemology, the process of knowledge production is founded upon symbolic interactionism and the notion that meaning is constructed between individuals through interactions and shared collective symbolic codes (Ferrell, 2015; O'Reilly, 2009). An emic perspective, which means the insider's perspective of reality (Fetterman, 2009) needs to be obtained and for this reason the researcher needs to be situated ‘within the interactions and situations in which meaning unfolds’ (Ferrell, 2015, p.295). Thus, ethnography has been selected as the research methodology in order to ‘produce rich and detailed accounts of people and the social processes they are embedded in’ (Drake & Earle, 2013, p.12). This should be especially welcomed within

restrictive, highly secretive and secluded environments, such as penal institutions. The need for prison ethnography or qualitative knowledge production about life in prison has been underlined by several distinguished penal researchers (Haney, 2015; Rhodes, 2001; Simon, 2000; Wacquant, 2002a) since ethnography provides understanding of the ‘lived’ prison experiences, which is vital in the age of mass incarceration. By using ethnography a researcher can enter the field and learn about and share ‘the experiences, constraints, beliefs, structures and meanings’ (Drake & Harvey, 2013, p.491) of the research population.

However, this study seeks to explore prisoner and staff lived experiences within the prison environment without ‘digging’ further into their ‘life history’ as recommended by Crewe *et al.* (2017); the research instead attempts to draw on Wacquant’s (2002a, p.371) suggestion of getting ‘in and out of the belly of the beast’ in order to explain how the prison system can be viewed in a wider socio-political context. Similarly, as acknowledged by Haney (2015, p.248), as much as it is about understanding the everyday life within the institution, it is about stepping outside of it ‘to see the broader structural context these facilities were embedded in’.

## **5.1 Ethnography and an Ethnographic Approach**

Ethnography has originated from social anthropology and one of the seminal texts is by Malinowski (1922) who described his experience of living for a prolonged period of time among South Pacific islanders. However, ethnography as a research methodology has evolved through the decades and its application currently goes far beyond the field of anthropology. There have been also significant changes in the



theoretical underpinnings of ethnography. If early ethnographers relied on positivism and functionalism, then currently ethnographers apply more reflexive and interpretive accounts. They also often adopt a broader view of the research field due to 'an increased awareness of the world as a single place' (O'Reilly, 2009, p.145). However, ethnographically based research can be diverse - comprising a mix of conventional and innovative methods and techniques. Thus, there is a wide variation of ethnographic studies and for this reason an extended explanation for the use of this term within the research framework should be provided (Hammersley, 2006).

For the purpose of this research, an ethnographic approach<sup>78</sup> entails a multi-method study of the everyday world and daily routines of prisoners and prison staff in the only women's prison in Latvia. However, it needs to be acknowledged that my ethnographic research design evolved as the study progressed, which is typical for an ethnographic study (see Hall, 2018; O'Reilly, 2009). Consequently, this study combined passive observations with active participation in day-to-day activities as well as informal conversations<sup>79</sup> and more formal semi-structured interviews with prisoners and prison staff about life in IWP. Overall 37 semi-structured interviews, 25 with women prisoners and 12 with staff, were conducted, which utilised appreciative inquiry or a strengths-based, positive framework (Liebling, 2015), further elaborated in the next section. Field notes were also an integral part of documenting data collection process and personal reflections, which were later used for analysing 'lived' prison experiences.

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<sup>78</sup> I refer to an ethnographic approach instead of ethnography due to limited time frame and opportunities to be immersed in the field.

<sup>79</sup> 'Unstructured' informal talks proved to be a valuable data source (see Sykes, 1958; Kaminski, 2004, O'Reilly, 2009).

This research was conducted over a seven month period spread over two years, which Hammersley (2006) would refer to as a part-time participant observation due to its limited time frame. However, despite adopting a ‘part-time’ ethnographic approach, this still allowed me to engage and interact with the worlds of others and gain ‘an understanding of the operations and mechanisms of a particular way of life’ (Hobbs, 2015, p.16). As part of the fieldwork, I had an opportunity to observe day-to-day interactions in different parts of the prison as well as exceptional events such as prison weddings<sup>80</sup> and graduation ceremonies.

Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that a prison specific environment places considerable constraints on ethnographic research practices. The ‘luxury’ of gaining keys and almost unrestricted movement in penal institutions, or even securing a particular space or ‘office’ in this spatially highly contested environment, seems to be more frequently enjoyed by those who research Western penal facilities (Crewe, 2009; Earle & Phillips, 2012; Gooch, 2017; Liebling, Price & Shefer, 2011; Nielsen, 2010; Rhodes, 2004; Ugelvik, 2014). However, those who attempt to ‘break into’ the post-Soviet penal space face more severe restrictions, such as limited access and movement or constantly remaining under the gaze of the authority (Michalon, 2013; Milhaud & Moran, 2013; Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2009). I shared similar struggles with the latter group of researchers. Inside IWP I was a burden to prison staff and my movements were always monitored. I did not carry keys in prison; I always relied on prison staff to collect and escort me around the prison. Officially, I was never allowed

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<sup>80</sup> During my fieldwork I witnessed three heterosexual weddings (one of which was with another prisoner) and I heard multiple stories of women and men prisoner romance through the letter exchange (as only prisoners have time to write letters in current day and age). One of my interviewees also gave me a poem written by an unknown male prisoner, which I promised to insert in my thesis see appendix 2).

just to wander around the prison facility and interact with prisoners or prison staff unless authorised to do so, although there were some opportunities to circumvent this rule as much of its implementation depended on staff's discretion, these more flexible opportunities occurred during the latter stage of my fieldwork.

However, not having access to certain 'freedoms' in prison makes a researcher more aligned to the experiences of prisoners and more exposed to the feeling of 'powerlessness' and dependence. These feelings allow the researcher to a degree to experience life in confined space (see Liebling, 1999). Those researchers who have been granted an official badge and almost unrestrained access to diverse facilities within prison (see Alford, 2000) can be criticised for their privileged position that places them apart from and above the research population (Minogue, 2009).

Moreover, an ethnographic approach was selected in order to produce closeness instead of otherness (Fassin, 2016). However, achieving closeness is particularly difficult in a prison context, where an unequal power relationship delineates members of staff and researchers from prisoners. As suggested by Jewkes (2012) researchers often have to position themselves in-between prison staff and prisoners in order to build trust and rapport. Prison researchers should not be seen as part of the structures of authority (Bandyopadhyay, 2010) or as being 'co-opted and positioned by the prevailing power relations' (Minogue, 2009, p.132). But at the same time they cannot be seen as purely voicing the views of prisoners if an attempt is being made to understand prison as a 'living structure'. Nevertheless, it can be a real challenge for a researcher to find a balance between prisoners and prison staff and to prevent research participants from feeling that the researcher has 'taken sides'.

The famous question of Howard Becker (1967, p.239) ‘whose side are we on?’ perfectly illustrates this challenge. Becker (1967) suggests that it is impossible to undertake neutral or uncontaminated research and eventually researchers are likely to take one side, whereas Liebling (2001, p.473) proposes that ‘it is possible to take more than one side seriously, to find merit in more than one perspective, and to do this without causing outrage on the side of officials or prisoners’ (see also Nielsen, 2010). Indeed as my research was largely influenced by Liebling’s approach to prison research through appreciative inquiry, I tried similarly to take both sides seriously. However, I do not intend to claim objectivity as this research is based on interpretivist epistemology, which refers to gaining knowledge of the world by interpreting ‘the meanings that humans attach to their actions’ (O’Reilly, 2009, p.118). As suggested by Ferrell (2015, p.301) researchers should aim to ‘achieve a deep, reflexive, and theoretically informed subjectivity whereby their own meanings, emotions, and understandings emerge in concert with those of their subjects’.

However, one of the current debates is whether ethnography should be based solely on inductive reasoning and building theory from the ground level through the obtained data (Ferrell, 2015; Hall, 2018) or should it incorporate both inductive and deductive approaches (Haney, 2015). Ferrell (2015, p.293) would argue that ethnography cannot be separated from theory as ‘method is theory, and theory method’. Whereas Haney (2015) highlights that ethnography is not only an inductive process and that the researcher should aim at achieving a greater balance between inductive and deductive approaches. Haney (2015, p.249) also suggests that theoretically informed ethnography can make academic scholarship more meaningful and revealing by bringing theories ‘closer to the social realities of contemporary punishment’. This

research sides with the latter view. Prior to entering IWP the theoretical underpinnings of neoliberal penalty as well as the conceptualisation of the Soviet penal legacy in the post-Soviet countries was established in order to make links to how this informs current penal practices and women's imprisonment in Latvia.

## 5.2 Devising a Prison Research Strategy

As suggested by Scott (2018, p.143), research methodologies and designs can be compromised by the political context; thus criminological research can 'often reflect the ontological assumptions of the state'. This particularly applies to prison research where multiple gatekeepers scrutinise the research proposal and ensure that it aligns with their interests. Gatekeepers play a significant role in research, most importantly providing or blocking access, making access conditional or 'shepherding the fieldworker in one direction or another' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p.66). Multiple gatekeepers<sup>81</sup> tend not only to allow or deny access but also assist in framing the research agenda and determine the course of study. This does not always align with what the researcher initially sets out to do. This might lead to contradictions, as the researcher's ontology might be contrary to that of the gate keepers (Hillyard *et al.*, 2004; Scott, 2018).

This research was no exception to this. My first research proposal was rejected outright by the Latvian Prison Administration (LPA), as it failed to be in line with the

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<sup>81</sup> In this research, it started with the University's Ethics Committee (from which ethical approval was attained just a few days prior to commencing the study), the Ministry of Justice, the LPA to the prison governor and other heads of departments. Hence, as suggested by Davies (2011, p.168) 'access at various levels of the prison staff hierarchy may need negotiating and re-negotiating'.

resocialisation process.<sup>82</sup> The LPA pointed out that the focus of the research had to be placed on positive individual changes achieved during imprisonment. Such strategies by power holders are also common occurrence in other jurisdictions as only those researchers who meet the official research agenda are allowed to do their research (Hillyard *et al.*, 2004; Reiter, 2014; Scott, 2018). Thus, I had to devise a new proposal and the selected strategy was to apply the framework of those researchers who are currently successfully ‘breaking in’ prisons. A decision was made to draw upon Liebling’s (2015) approach of appreciative inquiry.

Appreciative inquiry (AI) has a particular appeal to the gate keepers as instead of traditional problem focused approaches AI is ‘a strengths-based approach to social research’ (Liebling, 2015, p.252) and it offers ‘other truths’ about life in prison ‘survivals and achievements as well as pains and deprivations’ (Liebling, Elliott & Arnold, 2001, p.162). According to Liebling, Elliott and Arnold (2001, p.161), AI ‘constitutes a fair and inclusive research approach that generates a rich and faithful account of a prison to emerge’. AI can serve as a specific lens through, which to view the organisational culture and can also initiate required improvements, which align with the aim of penal reformers.

Although, as pointed out by Liebling (2015, p.253), asking positive questions can be unnatural and ‘takes some courage’ in a prison environment as it is ‘hardly conducive to conversations about human flourishing’ but equally it should be acknowledged that ‘the prison world is full of paradox: courage and compassion as well as pain’. Some of the most genuine answers to my appreciatively framed questions were

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<sup>82</sup> The term ‘resocialisation’ is widely used in Latvia within the criminal justice context instead of ‘rehabilitation’. This seems to be a shared terminology also used in other post-Soviet countries (see Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012).

met with surprise and an immediate reaction of ‘are you mocking me’, and at times research participants struggled to provide answers to some of the positively framed questions. The research design resulted in a study, which captured the ordinary and the everyday occurrences via an ethnographic approach (see Crewe, 2005b; Fassin, 2016), whereas exceptional but real experiences were obtained through AI as it ‘aspires to find the best in what is’ (Liebling, 2015, p.265).

In addition, this research is also subjected to the ‘lens’ of critical inquiry to provide knowledge of experienced pains within ‘carceral collectivism’ (Piacentini & Slade, 2015). It should be acknowledged that ‘prisons are places of sadness and terror, harm and injustice, secrecy and oppression’ (Scott & Codd, 2010, p.170), or as suggested by Carlen prison functions as ‘a state mechanism for legitimate pain delivery’ (Carlen, 1994, p.136). Thus, the pains of imprisonment should be an integral part of the research as ‘prison is all about pain – the pain of separation and loss, the wrench of restricted contact in the context of often fragile relationships, of human failings and struggles’ (Liebling, 1999, p.165).

This study was also informed by cultural criminology’s framework as the focus of my work is on the construction of meaning, control and power struggles within a women’s prison and, at times, even those struggles that go far beyond the prison walls. It is useful to apply cultural criminology’s framework as it has ‘a spirit of openness and dialectical flexibility’ (Hayward, 2016, p.298) and as it ‘seeks to highlight the interaction between constructions upwards and constructions downwards... rules created, rules broken, a constant interplay of moral entrepreneurship, moral innovation and transgression’ (Hayward & Young, 2004, p.259). This can be depicted through a site of struggle, which encompasses a power of control along with repression of

difference and active forms of resistance and subversive freedoms (Bevier, 2015) that contradict each other and generate a vibrant movement and ongoing social change.

### **5.3 Entering the Field**

It is widely accepted that prison research is a challenging field of study (Bosworth *et al.*, 2005; Crewe, 2014; Jewkes, 2012; Jewkes, 2014; Liebling, 2001; Liebling, 2014b; Reiter, 2014). Prisons tend to be both physically and bureaucratically isolated (Reiter, 2014) or traditionally referred to as ‘closed’ institutions (Davies, 2011), which are hostile environments for researchers. As Liebling (2014a, p.482) comments, it is not an ‘ordinary research environment’ as it is a ‘social world of intense control’ (Piché, Gaucher & Walby, 2014, p.450).

The very activity of undertaking prison research per se is deemed to be of a sensitive nature due to prisoners being considered ‘a special population deserving of additional research protections’ (Arriola, 2006, p.138). Haney (2015, p.237) argues that due to so many obstructions ‘it is now almost as difficult to break into the penal system as a qualitative researcher as it is to break out as an inmate’. Similarly, I had to face many of the difficulties described by other prison researchers and access to the prison was one of the fundamental challenges. I spent a year negotiating access and only after drafting a second research proposal was the study approved by the LPA and the Ministry of Justice and access was granted to a male remand prison. However, this



permission was later withdrawn after a Ministry of Justice working group meeting,<sup>83</sup> just a few days before the approved start date of the study. This served as a stark reminder that access can be ‘a recurring issue rather than a one-off hurdle’ (Davies, 2011, p.168).

Access was refused largely due to the selected method, namely the use of an ethnographic approach, the particular site of research (despite being the most iconic prison in Latvia, it was one of the most problematic) and my gender (a female researcher entering a predominantly masculine world). The research was deemed as ‘high-risk activity’ where the risks were too high to justify access, hence it was suggested that I enter a female prison instead.<sup>84</sup> It was presented to me as if I had to be grateful as ‘nobody wants a researcher entering their business’.<sup>85</sup> This largely resonates with Piacentini’s (2009) suggestion that prisons are enormous bureaucracies and that the prison administration feel uneasy and suspicious in the presence of an ‘outsider’ (see also Matthews, 1999; Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012). Similar concerns have been raised by Rhodes who argued that the use of an ‘ethnographic method encounters restriction, surveillance, and suspicion’ (Rhodes, 2013, p.16). In general, prison authorities tend to be reluctant towards researchers, fearing less than flattering

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<sup>83</sup> I was summoned to present my research project to experts from the Ministry of Justice, the LPA and the Probation Office. The final decision was not made during the Ministry of Justice working group meeting but delivered a week after by my contact person at the LPA.

<sup>84</sup> I was left with an impression that they were wary of multiple other issues such as presenting Latvia in a ‘good light’ and avoiding being perceived as a ‘post-Soviet’ state. During the meeting I was fiercely criticised for using the phrase ‘post-Soviet imprisonment’ in my research title. The official protocol of the meeting also revealed that by doing research in my initially selected prison site ‘might create a misleading representation of the Latvian prison system’. During the meeting understaffing was also mentioned as one of the main reasons for refusal.

<sup>85</sup> It was deemed as a favour because the prison governor only agreed because of respect and courtesy for the Head of the LPA.

discoveries about the institution and its management system may emerge (Arriola, 2006).

However, as argued by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983, p.54), the process of gaining access can also provide valuable insights into the ‘social organisation of the setting’. Indeed the process of gaining access to an all-female prison, instead of the initially selected site, has produced considerable insights into how the Latvian penal administration operates, namely, through cautiously avoiding international (or local) exposure and other risks associated with prison research and it ostensibly appears to operate on a system of favours.

This was certainly a very significant turning point in my research project, which had several implications. Firstly, apart from being one of the most difficult times emotionally as my research project was in disarray, I faced the difficult decision of whether to proceed with the initial plan and research population<sup>86</sup> or to undertake research into women's imprisonment. However, as the main aim was to explore what is ‘in the belly of the beast’, I accepted the offer to enter IWP. Only later did I realise the potential and strengths of this unexpected turning point, but it also reaffirmed that ‘ethnographic research proposals rarely look much like the finished products’ (Ugelvik, 2014, p.472).

Secondly, this meant that the lens through which I viewed imprisonment was to a certain extent influenced by the literature on male imprisonment, but as suggested by Carlen (1994, p.134) women’s imprisonment ‘might inform and be informed’ by studies of men’s imprisonment. This also ensured that gendered presumptions ‘about what is

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<sup>86</sup> Ostensibly, I could have focused on male prisoners released from custody.

relevant to women' (Liebling, 2009, p.22) were avoided. However, it is also important to understand why women's experience of imprisonment differs from men's? As pointed out by Carlen (1998, p.133) there are three main reasons:

'biological – women's physical needs are different to men's; social – women's role in the family is different to men's; and cultural – women's experiences of imprisonment are different to men's and have different meanings attached to them by both the women themselves and all those for whom, subsequently, they become 'prisoners' or ex-prisoners'.

Consequently, these fundamental gender differences have not only been theoretically considered but also vividly represented within the empirical chapters.

## **5.4 Positionality and Reflexivity**

Positionality or the researcher's position in relation to the study should be acknowledged prior to entering the fieldwork and data analysis, as personal subjectivities affect the perception and interpretation of the fieldwork. Feminist theorists developed a standpoint theory (see Harding, 2004; Harding & Norberg, 2005), which among other propositions suggests that one's position in society as well as identity constructions and cultural backgrounds influence that person's worldview (Temple & Young, 2004).

Indeed my interest in prison research cannot be divorced from my experience as a Soviet/post-Soviet child living in Latvia. My childhood was shaped by the turbulent transition period from the command to market economy, throughout which my working-class parents struggled to make both ends meet and support their three children. For this reason, I know what it means to struggle with poverty and limited food supply

but our family was not unique – many families went through the same struggle of survival at the time.

I have witnessed, first hand, instances of crime and corrupt behaviour and this triggered my interest in criminology and working towards a fairer and more just society, as too frequently those in positions of power and authority acted in corrupt ways. I came to realise that some of the people who were committing crimes were actually seeking their own kind of social justice in a society riddled with corrupt and criminal behaviour from the top down. Thus, I am not an exception to the frequent occurrence of research being driven by personal curiosity or ‘some conscious or unconscious value or interest whose origins pre-date the research project’ (Liebling, 1999, p.151).

My personal experience might suggest that I entered the field of prison research with rather biased and empathetic views towards those who fall within the criminal justice system, but at the same time I also believe that those who choose to work for the prison system and expose themselves to such a harmful environment for negligible remuneration must have some deeper commitments and meanings attached to this work, which I tried to investigate during my research. As Liebling (1999; 2001) and Nielsen (2010) suggest, researchers can empathise with both the imprisoned and those who guard them.

To some extent this also leads to a discussion of reflexivity, which can be defined as ‘developing a consciousness of one’s self in the process of research’ (Drake, Earle & Solan, 2015, p.11). During the fieldwork I tried to be sensitive to my own privileged position as opposed to those involved in my study (see Fleetwood, 2014). This privileged position as suggested by Rose (1997, p.307) entails ‘greater access both

to material resources and to the power inherent in the production of knowledge about others'. I did try to present myself as seeking their 'expertise' and 'knowledge' instead of positioning myself as an expert, as 'ethnography is a means of learning together' (O'Reilly, 2009, p.136). This also allowed the issue of the power imbalance between the researcher and the participant to be addressed (see Fleetwood, 2014). I also tried to dress simply and not to stand out and, in fact, many times I was assumed to be a prisoner by the prison guards, as in Latvia prisoners wear their personal clothes instead of uniforms. However, those who knew my full name rarely assumed that I was a 'pure' Latvian, thus to some extent it granted me some kind of 'outsider' status. Also, the fact that I was based abroad and linked to a foreign university intensified my 'outsider' status.

In general, at all times I was aware that my privileged position allowed me to leave the prison at will, so arguably I was not in 'touch with the defining reality of prisoners' experience – constraint on freedom and being locked up and under control' (Drake, Earle & Solan, 2015, p.3). Thus, the most valuable insights about life inside were gathered through informal conversations and interviews with women continuously exposed to the myriad harms of imprisonment. As told by one imprisoned women: '*it is morally very difficult... to remain as a human being*' (Teresa). Thus, one of the constant struggles is to feel human in the midst of difficulty, pain and sufferance. Overcoming the 'dehumanising' effects of imprisonment is a continuous battle which can extend beyond the prison walls.

## 5.5 Data Collection

The research was split into two phases. During phase I (from July 2015 to September 2015) an initial exploration of the women's prison was made along with the first semi-structured interviews with prisoners and prison staff. From the early days in the fieldwork, it emerged that doing qualitative research in IWP would be challenging. After a brief explanation over the phone of my research intentions and the timelines to the prison governor the response was that perhaps I should finish earlier as 'what can you do there?' [for so long].<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, we did manage to agree on our first face-to-face meeting for the next day.

Ostensibly the first day 'inside' was one of the most memorable, similar to the experience of other researchers (Ugelvik, 2014). I obtained an impression and opinion of the security measures in place and prison staff while queuing with the prisoners' visitors. They described this prison as the strictest regarding security measures and called its staff: '*a pain in the ass*'. I also became aware of some of the procedural impediments that I would face. I came to realise that I might be spending more time just to get in 'the field' than actually talking to somebody while inside.

After an official meeting with the prison governor, a series of accompanied tours around the prison facilities were arranged. It was useful for orientating myself within IWP, although I did feel like an intruder (see Ugelvik, 2014; Wacquant, 2002a) and an unwelcome guest who was wasting staff's precious time. Nevertheless, initially it was

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<sup>87</sup> Unfortunately, it seems there is not much understanding of the characteristics of qualitative research and its methods for knowledge production, the emphasis is more frequently placed on quantitative studies, which are less onerous for prison staff. Latvia, of course, is not unique regarding this aspect (see Drake, Earle & Solan, 2015; Wacquant, 2002a).

an important way of obtaining a broader understanding of the penal institution as well as establishing trust and visibility within the prison (see Crawley, 2004a; Nielsen, 2010). My restricted access was limited to week days only and, from 9 am – 4 pm and officially I was only allowed to remain inside for four hours per day, although this rule was not always enforced.

During my whole research project I was attached to the Department of Social Rehabilitation (locally referred to as Resocialisation) and my visits were arranged on a daily basis by the Head of the Department. During phase I, I was informed daily about the next visit and no advance plans for the week or month were made. To some extent I felt that I had no control over my time in prison. This reminded me of Ugelvik's (2014) view that ethnographic fieldwork can be 'messy' and likewise I struggled just to keep my head above water. There was no certainty or any meaningful plan, which only contributed to my experience of precarity, situating me within the conditions of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000b; 2013). By expanding Bauman's term, Ferrell (2015, p.297) refers to 'liquid ethnography' which combines Bauman's conceptualisation of liquid modernity with 'precarity' theorists, while focusing on 'groups divorced from social and spatial stability'.

Thus, initially I felt as if an 'ethnographic approach' was just a terminological façade that comfortably sat within methodological justifications on paper, but in practice my ethnographical engagement was extremely limited. Insights were mainly gathered through observations, overheard conversations and, at all times, I tried to draw on my ethnographically inclined self and to capture fragments of day-to-day life in the prison. I was concerned about not being 'in 'the deep end' of prison life' which as argued by Liebling (1999, p.163) would make the research very superficial and shallow.

During the first phase of interviewing all my interviewees were selected by the Head of the Department of Social Rehabilitation. I was aware, similar to other prison researchers, of the risks of a skewed sample, as only those prisoners ‘adjudged suitable by the prison authorities’ to be fit to participate in the research, or those who were ‘well-adjusted, emotionally stable respondents’, could do so (Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2009, p.707; see also Moran, Piacentini & Pallot, 2012). Almost all of those ‘selected’ by the prison authorities had never had a ‘report’ (an official record for prison rule violations)<sup>88</sup> and in general they all seemed to be on ‘good terms’ with the prison administration.<sup>89</sup>

Nevertheless, I did manage to set some conditions, such as interviewing first time or repeat offenders or suggesting a certain age group or women from a specific ethnic background. In addition, for both prisoners and staff I sought to include participants who had: a short-term experience within prison settings (less than a year); a medium-range experience (less than 5 years but more than one) and those who had a long term experience within prison settings (more than 5 years). This was important in order to capture the impact of length of exposure to prison life. I was also not allowed to see their case files so I did not possess any prior information about the interviewees – all I was told was their first name. Interviews with members of staff were initially met with some scepticism from more experienced staff members, as my first interview was with an inexperienced colleague (3 months in her job role). The argument was what could she possibly know about the work in prison?

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<sup>88</sup> Some of the exceptions were those who had had long prison ‘careers’, which led them to reflect on their younger selves and rule violations but they were not rule breakers during their current term.

<sup>89</sup> This view was also confirmed by my research participants who suggested that prison staff select only those who they trust.



Phase II took place from June 2016 to September 2016 during which, similar to phase I, for the first couple of months I made prison visits. However, this time it was more structured as for a month I was attached to the nail beauty course, which was followed by two-week observation of the work routines of prison officers. I was attached to various prison guards and it was one of the most difficult periods for me as a researcher. At last I had been thrown into ‘the deep end’ (Liebling, 1999, p.163), and I found it difficult to cope. As acknowledged by other prison researchers it can be difficult to be unemotional or unresponsive about life in the confined space of a prison (Fleetwood, 2009; Jewkes, 2012; Wacquant, 2002a).

During the nail beauty course I frequently volunteered as a nail model just to facilitate conversation. I did realise the potential risks and a member of staff did not recommend me doing so due to the potential exposure to injury or illness. Indeed, I was cut in the very first session and although I was anxious I felt it was too late to withdraw.<sup>90</sup> Anxious thoughts did cross my mind, but it seemed the only way I could get access to women and their stories and I thought surely they would not have such a course in prison if it could not be run safely.<sup>91</sup> To some extent this certainly brought me closer to the women and increased their level of trust and openness. Therefore, during phase II I tried to select all of the course participants as my interviewees, and this idea

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<sup>90</sup> I was also advised not to tell anybody that I was cut by the young woman who did the manicure. Obviously those cuts were immediately noticed by the teacher but all she did was just shake her head.

<sup>91</sup> I hoped that at least those who were undertaking this course would have undergone rigorous health checks and similar assumptions were made by the teacher, but those were only assumptions that in the end turned out to be false.

was supported by the Head of the Department of Social Rehabilitation, so I was pleased to find that all my efforts in building trust were not in vain.<sup>92</sup>

However, this was not the case for members of staff - despite having developed good relations I could not select my own prison staff sample. I felt as if I had to be grateful for any chance to interview prison staff. Usually the interviews with prison staff were timed - I was given an hour or less to go through all of the questions,<sup>93</sup> thus I was working against the clock. This was never the case with prisoners with whom I could have interviews that lasted several days. Perhaps for prisoners the interviews not only 'represented a welcome break from prison routine' (Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2009, p.707), but also provided a way of expressing their grievances about life in prison, and thus they were much more willing research participants. It has been argued that prisoners generally can be more distrustful and less willing research participants than those not bound to the prison environment (Arriola, 2006). Similar arguments have been attributed to prison staff (Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2009). While I would agree with the latter finding, with prisoners I found communication was much easier, more genuine and meaningful. Nevertheless, there were occasions when the women lied about the offence they had committed. Even though I never asked the women to disclose the offences for which they were imprisoned, many of them volunteered this information.

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<sup>92</sup> There were two exemptions – I was not allowed to interview a young woman who was not yet sentenced and also one minor. Also I did not manage to interview a couple of other women from the course due to other unforeseen reasons.

<sup>93</sup> There were only a few reflective and honest accounts from prison staff. Most of them provided rather general and non-conflictual views or talked as officials who represent the institution. So the interviews with employees were much more difficult than those with prisoners, therefore my field notes and observations proved to be crucial.

The interviews took place in relatively quiet spaces within the prison such as the prison school, the psychologist's office, the prisoner communal rest room (when it was empty), the kitchen area and various offices in the resocialisation department unit. However, most of the interviews took place in the administration office, where all of the important events for prisoners were held, such as prison weddings, Assessment Commissions, court proceedings and so forth. Initially I was concerned about using the latter place for the interviews as there could be many emotions and negative feelings linked to that particular formal setting. Only later I noticed a very interesting pattern emerging. It seemed that the interview depended on our positioning within the administration office; if the prisoner was sitting in the 'position of power' (closer to the place where the administrator would sit) and I was located further down from what I call the 'position of power' prisoners would genuinely be more critical about the administration and prison in general. Thus, I realised that even one's location within the carceral space could make a significant difference to the way the interviews developed. It seemed as if some women were trying to do justice to the establishment by sharing their pains of imprisonment.

The prison staff interviews mainly took place in their offices (if they had one) or, as with the prisoner interviews, they were also held within the administration office, or sometimes at their posts while on duty. However, contrary to the frankness of women prisoners, prison staff, especially prison officers, were particularly cautious and rarely raised any criticisms. There was always a sense of secrecy and one of the interviewees even openly said 'I don't know if I can say it'. Moreover, only one member of prison staff agreed for the interview to be recorded on an official interviewing schedule, which reinforces the secretive nature of the prison. During the interviews I was always left

alone with the interviewee regardless of whether she was a prisoner or an employee and there was never a discussion or a thought that a prison guard should be present during the interviews, in contrast with the experience of other post-Soviet prison researchers (Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2009).

## **5.6 Further Challenges and Limitations**

There were many further implications in doing prison research. Besides the already mentioned bureaucratic constraints arising from a difficult research environment with limited ‘freedoms’, there were further moral and emotional quandaries. As argued by Reiter (2014) prison research can be emotionally difficult as researchers can be exposed to fear, discomfort, violence or oppression. At the same time, as argued by Souhami, this exposure should be an integral part of the write-up as it allows the pain and discomfort to seep through, ‘demonstrating that their research is ethically sound, “authentic” and trustworthy’ (Souhami, 2013, cited in Jewkes, 2014, p.388). Similarly Jewkes argues that prison ethnographers need to acknowledge the emotional content of prison studies (Jewkes, 2012; 2014) and as suggested by Liebling (1999, p.147), a deeper look inside the research participants and researcher’s ‘world of emotions’ or subjective feelings during the ethnographic study can provide ‘a significant guide to or even source of valuable data’.

For this reason, I tried to keep a private diary to record observations and emotions during the fieldwork, although I share a similar reluctance as Crewe (2009, p.363) ‘to foreground myself in the analysis’ as it ‘was not what the study was about’

and, as pointed out by Phillips and Earle (2010, p.362), it can be a real danger to ‘privilege the voice of ethnographer over research subjects’. Thus, the difficulty of balancing the voices and responses of your participants with your own and ensuring that they are ‘in concert’ (Ferrell, 2015, p.301) with one another can be an ongoing challenge.

It is also important to reflect on how the research process affects the researched individuals, especially prisoners who, due to unequal power relations, can be deemed as particularly vulnerable participants (Arriola, 2006) as they are a ‘captive sample’ (Davies, 2011, p.164). Bosworth *et al.* (2005) raise the question about how research participants in prison experience this process. This stresses the researcher’s moral obligation and commitment to their research participants. It is unreasonable or even immoral to expect that as a researcher you engage only in unfeeling information ‘extraction’ from your research participants. In fact, there is much reciprocity expected. Perhaps not all of the research participants are equally ‘curious’ about your views and personal experiences but there were situations when we discussed personal matters (marriage, sexuality, education and other rather private aspects of life). Once during an interview we discovered that we come from the same city.<sup>94</sup>

Another similar hurdle was when prisoners spoke about some personal views which were rather controversial and expected me to agree with them. So sometimes when I felt it was necessary, I just shook my head or verbally agreed even if that was not my personal view. At times I felt as if to some extent I was losing my personal

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<sup>94</sup> We discussed this at the very end of the interview. Although I was very diligent about maintaining the anonymity of all of the research participants, I had to reassure her about it once again. Nevertheless, I could feel some changes in the way she spoke to me and it was quite clear that if this had happened earlier in the interview the flow would have been impeded.

integrity and such dilemmas have been highlighted by other prison researchers (Israel, 2004; Liebling, 2014b; Wacquant, 2002b). Sometimes I felt reluctant about sharing my own views or exposing personal aspects of my life. However, at the same time, as pointed out by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p.91) ‘it is hard to expect ‘honesty’ and ‘frankness’ while never being frank and honest about oneself’.

Furthermore, I should highlight several other methodological difficulties starting from recording data to getting ‘lost in translation’. During the summer of 2016 I was not allowed to take my voice recorder into the prison; so, taking all notes during the interviews was problematic. In total only eight interviews with women prisoners were recorded and, as mentioned earlier, only one member of staff agreed to be recorded.<sup>95</sup> Thus, I missed many words and sentences, my hand was in constant pain and my handwriting was sometimes illegible by the end of the day. Even when I felt that I might be missing some important information I did not ask the interviewee to repeat what they said, as that would have impeded the natural flow of the conversation. The level of difficulty was even higher when the interviews were conducted in Russian, as I automatically translated everything into Latvian to note it down; thus, sometimes I found myself getting lost in translation. On a few occasions, I had to ask the interviewees to explain what they meant by certain words and expressions but that seemed more natural as it was obvious that Russian is not my mother tongue. Thus, I tried as best as I could to record their experience as precisely as possible, regardless of their nationality or the language they spoke or whether or not I was allowed to use the voice recorder. The commitment of giving my research participants a voice and

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<sup>95</sup> There are two other recorded interviews with staff but they did not follow my interview schedule and were not part of my ‘official’ interview schedule.

understanding the ins and outs of this post-Soviet prison made me really try to grapple with all of the difficulties and ‘bulldoze’ through.

Also, due to the empirical data collection taking place during two separate periods, this resulted in interviews being a year apart. There was one successful interview which was continued after a year but two of my interviews were never finished. Nevertheless, all of the recorded 'lived' prison experiences were used in the empirical data analysis. Most of the interviews went without interruption but some interviewees were more challenging. There was one particular prisoner who took time off to do other things and activities while I was left waiting to talk later. Ostensibly she exerted her agency which, although frustrating to experience as a researcher, told much about her individual capacity to do so. She openly admitted that she would not jeopardise her daily plans because of the interview, reminding me that research participants do not want to be ‘subjects’ but agents (Liebling, 1999). Moreover, she did not like to answer my questions but she enjoyed talking about herself freely, so I let her speak and the conversation found its natural flow. In general, I did try to give as much flexibility and authority to my research participants as possible. Similarly there was one member of staff who many times chose not to answer the questions and overall that particular interview provided few insights.

## **5.7 Data Analysis and Representation**

Three broad key areas of interest were established prior to entering the field, namely: prison space; regime and control mechanisms; and relationships among prisoners and prison staff. These areas were also reflected within the semi-structured

interview schedule (see appendix 3 for women prisoners and appendix 4 for prison staff). Data analysis took place in multiple stages. The first initial data analysis took place during the fieldwork, which as suggested by Hall (2018, p.392) ‘helps the research to be a reflexive rather than linear process’. The crucial role of reflexivity in fieldwork has been highlighted by O’Reilly (2009, p.189) who suggests that reflexivity allows one to ‘think critically about the context and the acts of research and writing’.

The second stage of analysis took place after the end of the first part of the fieldwork. From September 2015 to June 2016 interviews with women prisoners and prison staff were transcribed and thematically analysed.<sup>96</sup> This provided some preliminary findings which then informed the second stage of my fieldwork, during which I tried to develop in particular such areas of interest as creation of place, prison subculture and hierarchies, pains of ‘carceral collectivism’ as well as embedded Soviet nostalgia. After gathering all my empirical data full immersion in the qualitative data could begin. Initially, open coding was applied, after which a second more focused coding took place, which linked some of the emerging themes to the established theoretical interpretations. At the same time some of the themes were also deduced from the research literature, thus coding themes derived both deductively and inductively. Despite ethnographies being commonly associated with inductive approaches (Ferrell, 2015; O’Reilly, 2009), I applied Haney’s (2015) suggestion of using a mix of inductive and deductive approaches for data analysis and representation. This implied not just

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<sup>96</sup> Data analysis was carried out in English and Latvian as both languages were used during the fieldwork, which can be seen as one of the limitations of this research as many cultural particularities and expressions were lost in translation (see Gray, 2006) and the authenticity of the data gathered can be questioned. However, as I am a native Latvian speaker with advanced Russian and English language proficiency, the best attempt was made to translate as precisely as possible without losing the main ideas and meanings.



providing an ethnographic account of life within confined space, but establishing links to neoliberal order and the ongoing struggle between the Soviet legacy and the new order.

The following empirical Chapters summarise the key findings from my fieldwork and interviews which, ostensibly, offer greater insights ‘on the phenomena at stake than more distant, cold or hands-off methodological approaches’ (Jefferson, 2015, p.171). In order to navigate through the empirical data, the selected approach is to use pseudonyms for prisoners and to indicate the period of time -they had been in prison, as well as whether they were first-timers or repeaters in prison (see appendix 5).<sup>97</sup> The underlying reason for this kind of approach is to highlight the importance of time and the endless counting that takes place inside prison walls – where ‘every single day counts’ (McGregor, 2015, p.11). This applies to counting down remaining days or the mundane head count procedure, which takes place multiple times per day.

Similarly, for prison staff, pseudonyms are used and their position is classified into three categories:

*Prison staff* (includes prison guards and other prison officers in middle-managerial positions);

*Prison staff, authority* (this implies a position of significant power, namely they are heads of departments);

*Prison staff, services* (includes prison staff who deliver a specific service within the prison, usually related to mental or physical wellbeing and chaplaincy).

It is important to mention that all of the interviews, which were audio recorded have quotation marks to acknowledge the direct speech.

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<sup>97</sup> Although it should be acknowledged that there are excerpts from my field notes these include conversations with other women, which do not follow this format.

## 5.8 Summary

The process of doing research can provide valuable insights into the phenomena under consideration; therefore, this Chapter incorporates not only ontological and epistemological standpoints and the reasons for the methodological choices for investigating life inside prison, but also offers some reflective insights into the process of implementing those methods in practice and undertaking research. My experience strongly resonated with those of other qualitative researchers, whether it being about gaining access from multiple gate keepers (Davies, 2011) or difficulties in breaking into this enclosed and secretive environment (Haney, 2015; Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2009; Piacentini, 2004b; Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012). Moreover, this highly regulated and constricted environment, coupled with the unpredictable and variable nature of the research field, provided only partial insights of life inside the only women's prison in Latvia. Thus, the limited opportunities for ethnographic research or part-time participant observation approaches (Hammersley, 2006) should be acknowledged. However, as reflexivity was an integral part of the process of data gathering and analysis; this not only enriched the data set but also allowed me to think critically about the process of doing research as well as writing about it (O'Reilly, 2009).

## **Foreword to Empirical Chapters**

The first three theoretical Chapters contextualised the clash of the titans and their historic and contemporary approaches towards social control mechanisms, namely imprisonment. This was represented through two different streams: the Western (the neoliberal titan) and Eastern (the Soviet titan), whereas the next three Chapters seek to represent the clash of the titans in action as it unfolded during the fieldwork in the only women's prison in Latvia.

The clash of the titans in action is displayed through three different lenses: the 'material', 'procedural' and 'ideological'. Chapter 6 provides the 'material' context to women's imprisonment in Latvia, which is important to highlight, as the first encounter is with the 'carceral space' and 'space is fundamental to the use of power' (Elden, 2001, p.152; see Foucault, 1979; 1980; 1984). Carceral space can be a vital determinant of how life in prison is experienced. Thus, the aim of the first empirical Chapter is to consider how prison space affects control mechanisms, the flow of power and how it can oppress and contribute towards the pains of imprisonment as well as become a source of empowerment and agency. Chapter 7 introduces the 'procedural' context and how the micro dynamics of the prison regime regulate life within this carceral space. The focus is on how the prison regime is delivered not only in terms of the prescribed routines and activities but also the relational elements of imprisonment, which are equally if not more important to the prison conditions (Crewe *et al.*, 2014b; Liebling, Arnold & Straub, 2011). Chapter 8 relates back to the 'ideological' context, with which this thesis started and the clash of the titans that takes place on a micro level in the minds and hearts of people who have had to negotiate and come to terms with the

contradictory ideologies and values. These three distinct lenses are used to nuance the complexity of imprisonment in the post-Soviet space and acknowledge the broader context in which prisons operate.

## **Chapter 6 Prison Space: the View from ‘Inside’**

### **Introduction**

This Chapter sketches the geographical and physical aspects of the prison, and analyses how these affect those who share this space as the ‘force of spaces is not just physical or architectural, but resides in the ways that places carry meanings, harbour and cultivate particular practices and sentiments’ (Crewe *et al.*, 2014b, p.71). The field of carceral geography, which effectively brings human geography, criminology and prison sociology into dialogue (Moran, 2012; 2017), has stimulated the study of prison life from a spatial perspective.

This Chapter reads more as a journey through the carceral space – the first section starts by considering the geographical presence of the prison and how it is linked with distinct Soviet penal geography and the hidden nature of it (Moran, 2014; Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2011; Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012; Moran, Piacentini & Pallot, 2013). After which it proceeds to the prison entry and the spatial particularities of the prison site, many of which are the consequences of an opportunistic approach towards imprisonment; this refers to how already built physical structures (building sites) are adapted to prison needs (Johnston, 2000). These spatial particularities also generate distinctive challenges and pains of imprisonment (Crewe, 2015; Sykes, 1958), which are discussed in the following section - constrained in space. The Chapter then delves deeper into the legacy of the prison as a factory, which can be perceived as a ‘special’ inheritance from the Soviet past. Despite significant changes in the way IWP operates, the empty factory buildings, the discontinued railway lines

outside the buildings and the disused intra-zone checkpoints (along with those in use) on the prison site were stark reminders of the Soviet past and ideology which was, and continues to be, embodied within material structures (see Humphrey, 2005).

The latter part of this Chapter investigates how women prisoners are able to engage with the creation of place or the creation of something that can be located, that has a material, visual form and has some relationship to a human being (Agnew, 1987, cited in Cresswell, 2011, p.133). It also considers how prison space is specifically gendered for women through gender specific ‘gentrification’. The word ‘gentrification’ is used as it captures well the process of enhancing the grim prison material environment in order to generate a greater visual appeal and such processes can be traced through the history of women’s imprisonment (see Zedner, 1998). The latter part of this section focuses on the special units or places of ‘difference’ as prison should not be viewed as a homogenous space. There are ‘different zones of the environment’ some of which are less prison-like (Crewe *et al.*, 2014b, p.61) allowing prisoners to escape from carceral power, but those are still ‘regulated escapes’ and therefore should be considered within the broader framework of penalty.

## **6.1 The Geographical Presence**

IWP is located among other buildings in a quiet suburban area in close proximity to the city centre of Riga and while initially it might not stand out as a significant fact it should be viewed in light of the Soviet distinct penal geography, which tends to be secretive and hidden (Moran, 2014; Piacentini, Pallot & Moran, 2009). Despite being located in close proximity to Riga’s city centre the prison site is

shielded from the view of by-passers by surrounding Soviet-style block buildings and a large paint and varnish factory, which as in other post-Soviet countries can be referred as ‘a distinctive spatiality that has been inherited from the Soviet era’ (Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012, p.3). This Soviet inheritance raised some reservations from the prison staff who challenged the location of the prison and expressed concerns about the close proximity of the chemical plant as well as residential housing: *the location is wrong – there is residential housing around, some kind of varnish factory... it can blow up* (Marika).<sup>98</sup>

Nevertheless, despite seemingly central position, IWP is so well hidden that it can be challenging to find it. I certainly struggled to locate it on my first visit:

*I found the right street and even the right house number - it was an ordinary Soviet style three-story house, but there was no sight of the prison, so I continued walking. It was a dead end street, so I asked some builders, who were working in the area, for directions, and they sent me back saying that the prison was behind that three-story house.*  
(Field notes)

One of the members of staff also acknowledged that despite living in this area she was not aware that there is a prison: *I’m living in this area but I didn’t know that there is a prison here. A person that isn’t related to this wouldn’t know that the prison is here* (Betija), which only further highlights the secluded and secretive nature of women’s imprisonment in Latvia. This resonates with the debate about the tension between the hiddenness and visibility of imprisonment in post-Soviet Russia (Piacentini, 2009; Piacentini & Katz, 2018), which is equally important for conceptualising imprisonment in Latvia as both the Tsarist and Soviet Russia have shaped its penal landscape and

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<sup>98</sup> Some of the shorter quotes from the research participants (fewer than three lines) will be integrated into the text in *italics* and citations from recorded interviews will be in *italics* and in direct quotation marks.

practices (Krūmiņš & Pokšāns, 1996), and thus it is crucial to engage ‘with the political and cultural past’ (Piacentini, 2009, p.85).

A prison in Ilguciems<sup>99</sup> was established by the Soviets at a former manor house, which had been turned into a prisoner-of-war camp after the Second World War later into a corrective labour camp for women. This serves as an example of the opportunistic nature of imprisonment as a result of which IWP has a rather unusual exterior that to some extent fails to live up to ‘the architectural symbolism of incarceration’ (Jewkes & Moran, 2017, p.543). It is barely recognisable as a site of confinement – the barbed wired perimeter is among the only ‘traditional’ signs of imprisonment. The outer entrance of the prison consists of a low-rise prison wall and a long-stretched ‘bungalow’ style house (see Figure 1 below), which has two entrances - one to the prison and the other one is a drop-in point for friends or relatives to bring permitted items to those who are located on the other side of the wall.

In close proximity to the entrance there is also a typical Soviet style bench on which along with other prison visitors I spent a lot of time prior to entering the prison.<sup>100</sup> At times some of the visitors were ex-prisoners themselves so ‘everything became fieldwork’ (Liebling, 1999, p.159). Further up there was another Soviet style bench, which was used as the official smoking area by the prison staff who could leave the

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<sup>99</sup> Ilguciems [Ilģuciems] is one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Riga, the capital city of Latvia.

<sup>100</sup> On many occasions I was waiting up to almost an hour just to enter the prison (on a couple of occasions I was turned away just because by waiting outside I had already missed the event that I tried to attend). The second consecutive summer was especially frustrating as waiting times for entry on average doubled. Thus the Soviet style bench became my favourite place to take notes and observe prison surroundings. My field notes entry for 08/09/2016 reads: *Well today I have been waiting and waiting it's about 40 minutes already but I have noticed that now I'm somehow classified as 'lower priority' unlike last year when it was much easier to get in. This year for most of the time I have been waiting and waiting. Sometimes I want to know if it is some kind of a strategy – are they testing me or taking deliberate decisions to obstruct my access.*



prison during their breaks.<sup>101</sup> During my fieldwork I observed a prevalent culture of smoking by prison staff and women prisoners. Smoking areas were popular places in which people gathered throughout the day and seemingly those occasions were used for sharing and exchanging information, as told by one of the prisoners: *I don't have to talk*



*with anyone I go out to smoke and I find out everything* (Isobel).

Figure 1 IWP, September 20, 2016.  
Photo by author.

## 6.2 Entry to IWP

The entrance procedure typically consists of a mundane protocol – ringing the bell,<sup>102</sup> handing in the ID and waiting for the entry slip to be issued. Then a security guard calls the visitor in and at a small security window in return for the entry slip<sup>103</sup> visitors are expected to hand in mobile phones and any other prohibited items. Then

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<sup>101</sup> Many rushed to smoke and use their phones as the latter is a prohibited item inside. This was raised as one of the issues by a lower ranking staff member as only the heads of department and the top management could bring their mobile phones inside while on duty.

<sup>102</sup> Only during the second consecutive summer in prison was I told by the prison staff that it is impolite to ring the bell as security guards are frustrated by the sound of it.

<sup>103</sup> As I was not issued with a temporary visitor's card by the LPA I was treated as a daily visitor involving all of the relevant bureaucratic procedures and paper work. For security guards my visits were burdensome, which only added to one of the general complaints shared by many prison staff of the amount of paper work they are required to do on a day-to-day basis.

after a further barred gate entrance there are lockers in which visitors can leave their belongings. It is a tiny space and it creates a daunting sensation of being locked up as from both sides gates separate the visitor from either entering or exiting the prison. During my fieldwork, I noticed that security guards frequently displayed their power and control by making visitors and prison staff wait in this tiny space.<sup>104</sup> This practice beyond being one of the exertions of power and control allows visitors to experience what it means to be imprisoned and even if the duration might be only for several minutes the sensation and impact can be powerful.<sup>105</sup> This allows one to experience circumstances reminiscent of prison life, which is particularly important for researchers (Liebling, 1999).

However, eventually the door lock is released and the visitor is let into prison but the low rise red-brick buildings hardly meet the ‘typical’ expectations of the austere prison façade. The greenery and flower beds further draw attention away from the harsh reality of being in prison and yet not seeing or feeling the coercive power, which can be referred to as punishment in disguise (Hannah-Moffat, 2001). As shared by one of the prisoners when she arrived at IWP she could not believe that it is a prison as her arrival coincided with a time when children were outside. It was only when she entered the prison building that she realised that it is indeed a prison:

*‘Honestly I didn’t even believe that this is a prison... I somehow saw that here are plastic windows... little kids are walking, the parents, well I kind of thought where have we arrived where is the prison?... When they let us out of the vehicle and we went into the remand section and then in a corridor I*

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<sup>104</sup> I spent quite a lot of time there as I had to wait to be collected by prison staff from my affiliated department or sometimes I was directly escorted by the security guards.

<sup>105</sup> Initially I found it odd as it seemed to be applied as a security measure, which substituted checks and verifications of the possessions, and only later, it dawned on me that this practice is much more powerful than any of the checks of the possessions.

*indeed realised yes, this is really a prison the doors are completely different, everything is different.*<sup>106</sup>  
(Annie, prisoner of 3 years and 3 months, first timer)

This ostensibly signifies the apparent lack of ‘systems of cultural symbolism’ (Jewkes & Moran, 2017) in relation to prison sites, which implies that opportunistically selected buildings as prison sites rarely serve as manifestations of punitive penal philosophies. In general, Russians for centuries have favoured banishment and ‘in exile’ imprisonment (Katz & Pallot, 2014; Pallot, 2015; Piacentini & Pallot, 2014; Retish, 2017), which could be one of many reasons why prison architecture and design did not gain the same attention or importance in either Tsarist or the Soviet Russia as in the West.<sup>107</sup>

Despite lacking the visual manifestation of a penal institution, there was no lack of traditional ‘protective’ mechanisms, which insulate the penal space from outsiders. Similar to the experience of other researchers in the post-Soviet penal space (see Milhaud & Moran, 2013; Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2009), ‘breaking’ into IWP was difficult. Initially, like other prison visitors, I was taken for an ‘official’ tour, which showed some of the most up to date facilities. Only after some time I was taken for a more realistic tour where many of the more unpleasant sites were revealed. This, it seems, is a commonly used strategy as later I heard many grievances from prisoners about how when the inspectors come they are only shown selected places, shielding the harsher prison reality. As suggested by Beth: *when the bosses are coming everything is*

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<sup>106</sup> A distinct pattern seemed to emerge in this Chapter as those were mainly first timers who spoke more vocally about the spatial aspects of imprisonment whereas repeaters shared a more nuanced and in depth view about the pains of imprisonment.

<sup>107</sup> Of course, architects were also involved in prison construction in the Russian Empire. The already mentioned Saint Petersburg’s prison, designed by architect Anton Tomishko, at its construction time in the late 19th century became the most advanced prison facility in Europe (Shapiro, 2014) or similarly, Latvia’s Riga Central Prison, which was built at the beginning of the 20th century after Friesendorf’s project (Krūmiņš & Pokšāns, 1996).

*cleared. You come here once but we live here.* Similarly as claimed by Isobel: *when the inspection comes then the double-bunk beds are taken away and you see how good we are living [and] after that they bring even more beds in.* Alyokhina (2017) refers to this practice as the ‘clean-up’, which takes place upon arrival of an inspector or a Human Rights Commissioner. Prison inspectors and other visitors are only allowed to see the well-maintained areas of the prison, which as suggested by Vander Beken (2017, p.90) can be used as ‘excellent opportunities to put on a bit of a show’. This seems to be a commonly used practice within the post- Soviet space (see Alyokhina, 2017; Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2009) as well as beyond it (Pakes, 2015; Piché & Walby, 2010).

It should also be acknowledged that prison visitors are an additional burden for prison staff as they disrupt their work pattern and delay their ordinary day-to-day tasks, which prison staff must execute regardless of additional burdens. This mean they might have to extend their work shifts into late nights or even on their days off, one staff member commented:

*They don't understand what it means for us, sometimes I want to receive them [visitors] badly so that they stop bringing them, as employees have to spend the day with the visitors and then there is the day-to-day work that still needs to be finished... long hours at night and even coming to work on your day off... that is what happens.*  
(Eva, prison staff)

Thus, there seem to be few benefits from prison tours as the real conditions of life in prison are shielded from the view of visitors. It is an additional burden for prison staff and, more importantly, the moral dimension of this practice should be questioned as prisoners can feel as ‘being treated as objects’ (Minogue, 2009, p.134). However, spatial aspects are important determinants of daily life and the prison routines, and for IWP there are many spatial particularities, which need to be considered.

### 6.3 Spatial Particularities of the Prison Site

Due to the fact that IWP was not built as a prison, its structural organisation can be impractical. All of the structures where women are located consist of rectangular multi-storey buildings in which prison staff need to move up-and-down the stairs, which is inconvenient and tiring as one of them commented: *it's a lot of running up and down* (Katja) or as acknowledged by another: *if looking from the prison officer's perspective... many times walking in and out from a second or third floor is not comfortable* (Linda). This ostensibly is one of the reasons why prison officers are rotated around the buildings as each unit's security level determines the level of difficulty. As suggested by Fiddler (2010) the building determines the type of internal movement.

Also as noted by one of prisoners the physical weariness of the prison staff can be visible at the end of the day:

*They run too much during the day... that the tiredness shows... they are falling short of breath... what else do you need? What medicine... I say [to other prisoners] try yourself to run all day... on those stairs... indeed how they can feel at 10 pm.*

(Suleima, prisoner of half a year, first timer)

Prison staff similarly shared their experiences of being exhausted by the end of their shifts, which had an impact on their family life. The incredible amount of walking that prison officers have to do per shift was highlighted by many prison officers and I was told that one of them tried to record her daily movements:

*The prison officer counted how many stairs she did and when she was at home and her husband asked why she is exhausted she said: imagine I walked 43 floors and back!*

(Alina, prison staff)

I also managed to experience some of it when for a two-week period I was shadowing the prison officers in different units.<sup>108</sup> The high security section in the ‘zone’ was the most exhausting as it involved constant movement between the two floors and every single woman had to be taken individually down for appointments.

In addition to the impractical design, the internal organisation of activities and places could be viewed as somewhat chaotic. It seems that by adapting structures, which are built for other purposes than imprisonment leads to a rather opportunistic approach in relation to internal organisation:

*These buildings were not built for it [as a prison], they were realistically adapted... there is a school in our territory in which teaching takes place, there are classes also in another building. We have everything all over the place... [it is] messy.*  
(Laima, prison staff, authority)

*What I like here, I don't like anything – everything is wrong... in general we are trying to adapt it and to improve it as much as we can.*  
(Marika, prison staff)

The material environment within buildings could also be viewed as ‘adapted’. The Soviet legacy permeates the interior and exterior of the prison. Despite noticeable improvements there are visual reminders of the past, which have preserved the ‘Soviet spirit’ and for some staff members it might even seem that: *everything [here] is from the Soviet times* (Betija) or that in this prison: *you can't feel that it's the 21st century* (Zaiga). This resonates with Matthews (1999, p.27) view that the prison space is never neutral as it sends out messages and ‘provides the basis for the construction and dissemination of ideologies’.

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<sup>108</sup> Just before shadowing the prison officers I was told by a senior member of staff that finally I will see what it really means to be in prison and this indeed was true – I gained valuable insights into life inside.

Moreover, the limited resources available for prison improvements have forced the prison administration to focus on repairing the ‘holes’ and ‘crumbling walls’ within the prison system or adopting a piecemeal approach to renovation instead of making substantive structural changes. As one of the prison staff suggested while escorting me around the prison *it is all about the money, which we don’t have much of* (Maira). In fact, many of the prison staff pointed out that they are doing whatever they can to improve prison conditions and prisoners reinforced this view. However, as highlighted by one of the prisoners this kind of piecemeal approach towards renovation does little to change the overall impression:

*Supposedly little by little they are renovating this detachment block ‘otryad’; the rooms will be renovated but everything will be brought back... they’ll paint the wall and floors... nothing changes because of that.*  
(Felicity, prisoner of 1 year and 3 months, repeater)

The cosmetic renovation does little to improve the available furnishings. For example, one of the humiliating practices that could be highlighted was the use of cardboard boxes as storage units for prisoner belongings. This was found unacceptable by some of the prisoners:

*In the zone we have iron beds, our stuff in cardboard boxes under our beds... It is not normal that in the 21st century you need to keep your things in a cardboard box under your bed.*  
(Mary, prisoner of 1 and half years, first timer)

Asare (2009), a Latvian writer who endured a prison sentence in IWP during 2000’s, has described this practice as odd as it makes you feel as if all that belongs to you can fit in one secondhand cardboard box, in which any screw can put their nose in and rummage through your ‘treasures’. She managed to convey a deep sense of humiliation and irony, and it should be pointed out that this practice has remained firmly in place.

In addition, there are more serious concerns in relation to the material environment, which make it a more unbearable experience for the women. Serious concerns have been raised by women prisoners due to the lack of ventilation, the overall moisture, mould and the temperature in the cells:

*The premises are insane. If from outside you can see crumbling walls then what it is inside... is cold, walls without insulation, mould on the wall... You can ventilate by opening a window. During summers it is +30 degrees we wrap ourselves in wet bedsheets to fall asleep. The door hatch is open all night if from the opposite cell the hatch is open too then there is a good air flow and you can sleep at night. There is no air conditioner. Small premises... In winter we slept in our coats it was too cold with the covers.*  
(Mary, prisoner of 1 and half years, first timer)

Some prisoners while acknowledging the poor prison conditions and the shortage of available resources for improvements also used the principle of ‘less eligibility’, which originates from the liberal notion of the social contract between the individual and the state. Essentially the assumption might be that the rule violations by offenders ‘justify a reduction in their entitlement to the legitimate expectations enjoyed by other citizens’ (Player, 2014, p.288). Prisoners might feel that they are unworthy of receiving state assistance as there are more important priorities than addressing the needs of the ‘social waste’, which often are ‘the last on the list’:

*Renovation is needed in many places... but there is no money for everything... it is orderly and tidy here... but... there are more important things – health care and why for something like prisoners they need to invest - in such societal waste... I understand... that the state cannot there is also medicine, education... unfortunately we are the last on the list.*  
(Zaza, prisoner of 4 months, repeater)

Thus, women might accept poor and overcrowded conditions as part of their punishment. As in ‘carceral collectivism’ many people share the same premises, space can be indeed a highly contested issue. Shared living arrangements can require the



establishment of an informal movement schedule. When space is limited people seemingly resort to their own ‘spatial rules’:

*They were waking up according to a schedule... because it's impossible to move around... there is a small place where to move... the gap between the beds is a maximum of a meter you cannot move around there, you have to do it according to a schedule.*

(Beth prisoner of 5 months, first timer)

Similarly as acknowledged by another woman- there is little room for any movement in the cell: *very small rooms, if in that small room we are six... if all of us step out on the floor there is nowhere to turn around* (Bella).

The particular dormitory type living arrangements result not only in the loss of privacy but also advanced tensions and conflicts (Altman, 1975; Milhaud & Moran, 2013; Wener, 2012). This was echoed by many prisoners Teresa, for example, suggested: *‘there are many people... [and] you have to get used to it, there is nothing you can do... it depends on your character some can put up with others [some cannot]’*. Arguments can easily arise due to misplaced personal belongings and a fierce competition takes place for more luxury amenities such as the fridge. During the interviews I was also told a strategy, which prisoners deploy in order to ‘keep’ or ‘reserve’ their space in the fridge, which just highlights this very competitive spatial environment:

*Every Tuesday and Thursday there are conflicts exactly about the fridge – why are you using my shelf, why did you push, squeeze [something]... I... squeezed your bag at the side and placed my one nicely, that's how it is... everything needs to be solved with tricks as we do. We consume our products as we don't want to lose the place then we put in an empty jar a three millimeter cheese so that it stays there and reserves the place.*

(Beth, prisoner of 5 months, first timer)

There are also other contested spaces and amenities such as toilets and bathrooms (see Tolokonnikova & Žižek, 2014) in particular at the lower security level as there are only few facilities available per floor:

*There are always some conflict situations in the toilets. There is one shower on the floor you can't manage to wash, also always some conflict situations. Four toilets but only in two you can flush the water - there is also a queue and some conflicts.*

(Isobel, prisoner of 1 year and 1.5 months, first timer)

However, it is rarely the prison's physical conditions that prisoners find the most difficult to deal with instead it is the sensation that they are constrained and disempowered or the 'mortification of self' (Goffman, 1961, p.31), which is the hardest to bear. Therefore the next section reveals some of the shared pains of imprisonment under carceral collectivism.

## **6.4 Constrained in Space and Time**

During my fieldwork women on multiple occasions questioned if I see 'the real thing' as the main frustrations are internal and personal. They seemed to be concerned that I will see only the 'good' side of imprisonment – the activities and other day-to-day engagements that do not represent the real suffering of being imprisoned. Hence, during the interviews I tried to delve deeper into their lived experiences and even if my questions were framed through appreciative enquiry, women shared their pains and sufferings. As acknowledged by many penal scholars the pains of imprisonment should be an integral part of any prison research (Liebling, 1999; Scott & Codd, 2010) as the prison should be named 'for what it is – a place structured to deliver violence, pain and suffering' (Scott, 2015, p.56). Imprisonment is particularly painful for women who

suffer from being removed from their children and families (Burman *et al.*, 2015; Liebling, 1994). This as pointed out by Crewe *et al.* (2017) can be defined as one of the gendered pains of imprisonment, in particular for those women serving long sentences, which might also impede them becoming mothers (Carlen & Worrall, 2004). As argued by Liebling (1994, p.8) women's self-harm and suicide in prison is a 'coping mechanism' and instead of being a 'cry for help' it is rather a 'cry of pain'.

Much of the pain and suffering is linked with isolation and a sense of 'time out of life' (Downes, 1988, p.179) or that 'time served in prison is not so much 'spent' as 'wasted'' (Matthews, 1999, p.39).<sup>109</sup> As pointed out by Susan, it is not so hard to endure prison conditions but it is difficult to accept being constrained and 'pulled out' of life:

*I guess the most... the most difficult was to accept that I'm here. Not the conditions themselves but that you have been pulled out, you know you are constrained within those four walls and all your life is out there.*  
(Susan, prisoner of 8 years, first timer)

There seems to be a shared sense of life carrying on outside but those who are in prison no longer belong to this life (Asare, 2009; Downes, 1988). Life inside can be viewed as something temporary or that this period of their life is not forming a part of their 'real' life. In fact, it can be viewed as something external and contrary to life outside as time inside 'works on you' because with every day prisoners get closer to release and in a way every single day that passes can be celebrated:

*In life we are chasing after time - to see the doctor, rushing to get to work. Here time works on you (researcher: how do you mean it?) Every single day that passes gets you closer to freedom. Outside you worry that with each day you get older, here you don't worry about that – every single day that*

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<sup>109</sup> This issue is prominent regardless of the type of the prison facility and whether it is a cellular confinement or 'carceral collectivism'.

*you pass brings you closer to freedom.* (Flame, prisoner of 1 year and 5 months, repeater)

However, it is not easy to ‘celebrate’ the passing days in prison. The sensation of being constrained within space is especially pronounced while being either on remand or on the high security level in the ‘zone’ where the lock-up can be up to 23 hours per day:

*Those are closed premises with iron doors, big keys and a small hatch where they give us porridge. That is prison... You don't go anywhere, you are being served. All your life is in that square.*  
(Mary, prisoner of 1 and half years, first timer)

As acknowledged by Asare (2009) ostensibly while being locked up for up to 23 hours per day all you can do is wait. Similarly during interviews women acknowledged this painful constant waiting for something: *if you are waiting for something – a visit or school then time is dragging. For me time is dragging so much* (Bella).

Closed or high security units are the most difficult not just for prisoners but also for prison staff. It can be physically exhausting as prisoners are usually located on different floors (as discussed earlier) and it is also emotionally difficult as prison staff encounter prisoner anger outbursts and frustrations. As shared by one of the staff members: *people are annoyed that they can't go anywhere... they need to write applications who gets those [angry] outbursts... the staff* (Katja). Although some prison staff on the contrary, acknowledged that it is easier to work on remand because women have not yet become accustomed to the system and they have fewer requests and demands, whereas after being sentenced and moved to the ‘zone’ they become ‘permanent inhabitants’ with many questions and requests. Prison staff seem to benefit

from the vulnerable and confused state of women upon entering the prison (see Moore & Scraton, 2014).

It is also important to point out that some of the pains of imprisonment in the ‘zone’ can be caused by the spatial arrangements (see Figure 2 below). Due to the fact that both the high security and low security units are located in front of each other, prisoners on high security level can observe the free movement on the opposite side. This might result in an increased sense of ‘tightness’ (see Crewe, 2011a; Downes, 1988). As suggested by Crewe (2011a, p.522) prisoners experience ‘tightness’ through the way power operates - ‘it is all-encompassing and invasive, in that it promotes the self-regulation of all aspects of conduct, addressing both the psyche and the body’. Prisoners on the high security unit become more complicit and obedient in order to progress and enjoy relative freedom on the lower security regime and vice versa. For those who can enjoy freedom of movement, the high security unit serves as a stark reminder of the possible consequences for breaching the prison rules and prison staff seem to be aware of this: *if you have violations, bad behaviour then all of the time you have to be on the higher security level but everyone wants to move freely* (Ira).

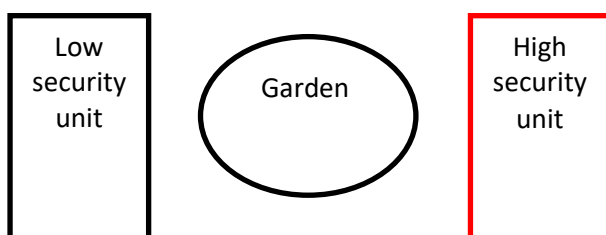


Figure 2 *The spatial outline of the ‘zone’*

The free movement of prisoners on the lower security level can alleviate some of the frustrations and it can be deemed that most aspects of life are better on a lower security regime (see Crewe, 2015; Sparks & Bottoms, 1995). Nevertheless, the lower security level is also known for the lack of staff presence and control. In fact there were no specific places or posts allocated for prison officers on the lower security level as was pointed out by prison staff: *on the lower security level the officers don't have any room; you sit there in the corridor in the same place with prisoners* (Linda). This could imply that there is a greater staff-prisoner interaction but it seems that this is not the case. During my fieldwork and interviews in this unit I rarely saw any prison guards being present and it was also confirmed by women:

*Yes, they [prison officers] move around there but I see them very little – in the morning they say good morning and in the evening good night. At lunch time they open the gates.*

(Isobel, prisoner of 1 year and 1.5 months, first timer)

In general, 'getting through to staff' can be more difficult on the lower security regime despite greater freedom of movement:

*When you are on the lower security level you have few opportunities to talk at length with someone, just briefly passing by. We don't have any other opportunities we can talk to a limited amount of people.*

(Mary, prisoner of 1 and half years, first timer)

Moreover, as argued by Crewe (2015, p.56), greater freedom of movement coupled with a lower ratio of prison staff can 'create an environment in which prisoners may face higher threats from each other than they do in more controlled environments' (see also Sparks & Bottoms, 1995). Alluding to this, some women expressed fears of moving from the higher security regime to the lower one due to the greater exposure to other women:

*I'm afraid how it will be on the lower security level. There are more people... many rooms... you don't know where you will end up, in which room... here you know that nobody will come into your room and won't go through your stuff, there you don't know how it will be... the same communication... it will be difficult... one thing is to see [someone] in the dining room... or just see like that... but to be in the same room is different... you'll have to speak.*

(Suleima, prisoner of half a year, first timer)

Hence in certain units prison staff might have limited presence and control (this aspect will be further developed under the section of Places of 'difference').

Prison staff, similar to prisoners, experience spatial 'squeeze'. Some prison staff members had no allocated office space: *I don't have my own office so I walk from one to another* (Betija). In some units prison officer posts were tiny and in poor condition, but more bizarrely in one of the units the officer's post was a converted prison cell, with very limited changes:

*We could sit in her office, which is the same as a prison cell just with a table – even the door is the same prison cell's door just the hatch has been replaced with a paper.*

(Field notes)

This ostensibly is one of the most emblematic material expressions of 'doing time together'.<sup>110</sup> In general while doing my research I heard several comments from both women prisoners and staff of 'being one family' or that 'they do their time together',<sup>111</sup> which calls into question the polarisation of prison population or commonly assumed

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<sup>110</sup> However, at the same time there was ongoing construction work in the unit and perhaps it was just a temporary 'office place'. I did not ask for any clarification and neither did prison staff offer an explanation.

<sup>111</sup> However, this was voiced only by the most experienced members of staff and similarly women with the longest criminal careers who consequently have been in prison for long periods of time.

dichotomy between ‘us’ – prisoners and ‘them’ - officers<sup>112</sup> and vice versa (see Goffman, 1961). There was some kind of acknowledgement of their shared destiny of being prison ‘inhabitants’ although in different capacities as suggested by prisoners: *‘they likewise just do their time like us. We go out... we come back... but they are sitting and sitting here’* (Emily) or as shared by Lidia: *‘we are like relatives, they have also been here for many years, the difference is only that they don’t sleep here during the night’*. Similar suggestions were made by prison staff members who felt isolated and imprisoned:

*We are also in isolation, I’m in prison too. The fact that I will be going home to sleep and in the morning I will be back doesn’t mean anything.*  
(Victor, prison staff, services)

Prison staff and women prisoners indeed share the same outdated prison environment, which embodies the visual reminders of the Soviet past and creates the sensation of still living through this epoch:

*‘The architecture embodies some kind of spirit of the age [the Soviet era] and these premises are soaked with the spirit of that age... by living in these premises they still feel as in the Soviet Union.’*  
(Dina, prison staff, services)

This seems in line with Deshpande’s (2000, p.172) argument that spatial arrangements can be used to ‘tie an imagined space to a real place in such a way that these ties also bind people to particular identities and to the political/practical consequences they entail’. Indeed there seems to be some nostalgia among both elderly women prisoners and the prison staff towards the Soviet past (this will be further developed in Chapter 8).

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<sup>112</sup> Although it should be highlighted that this dichotomy was maintained by some prisoners, for example, Flame suggested that: *of course we are on different sides – they are the law and we the law breakers*. The same applies to prison staff who supported this view that prisoners: *are on one side, we are on the other* (Livija).



Moreover, structurally there are some reminders of the past, which cannot be easily removed from the prison sites and the next section attempts to delve deeper into one of the most iconic elements of Soviet imprisonment, which has had a lasting influence on both the prison landscape and regime, namely the prison as a factory.

## **6.5 The Legacy of the Prison as a Factory**

The Soviet legacy permeates physical space – the empty factory buildings, the disused intra-zone checkpoints<sup>113</sup> on the prison site and the discontinued railway lines outside the buildings were stark reminders of the Soviet past and ideology, which was embodied within material structures (Humphrey, 2005). These features of the prison layout in particular speak of a different era and penal philosophy (see Fiddler, 2010; Wener, 2012). A very similar description of the prison design is provided by Alyokhina (2017, p.151) who endured her sentence in a Russian penal colony after the Pussy Riot performance at Moscow's Cathedrale of Christ the Saviour in February 2012: 'the factory is located in the colony's industrial zone, which you reach through a check-point. The school, the barracks, the club and the disciplinary block are in the residential zone'. Thus, even if IWP seems to be hardly comparable to the Russian large size penal colonies, many structural similarities remain and borrowing Haney's (2010, p.86) description of a women's prison in Hungary, it can be viewed 'like the epitome of a communist labour camp'.

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<sup>113</sup> One of the checkpoints, which led to a small factory or the so-called 'production', was still in use as a post for prison officers.

During the Soviet times the prison was run as a factory but after the breakdown of the Soviet project those premises were abandoned and currently have become an increasing liability to the state (The Cabinet of Ministers, 2009). As recalled by Emily who was imprisoned during the Soviet time, the underlying assumption was that ‘zek’<sup>114</sup> must work:

*‘Zek must work... At 6 am the bell... it didn’t matter if you needed to pee or not, you had to stand in a rank... all day you worked and you fell off your feet ‘ty bez nog’ [in the evening]... 10 o’clock you switched off in bed... you were drained ‘nekakoi’.*

(Emily, prisoner of 1 year, repeater)

The Soviets were keen to exploit the same factory system, which was fiercely criticised as a ‘real subsumption of labour under capital’ (Marx, cited in De Giorgi, 2006, p.15). As pointed out by a prison staff member who worked during the Soviet times, prison at that time could be referred to as a large scale factory with an on-site ever available workforce: *there were 1600 women... they worked in three shifts, they worked all day long* (Rita).

The social function of Soviet imprisonment was ‘political correction: prisoners were ‘rehabilitated’ as builders of the communist utopia’ (Piacentini, 2009, p.80). Thus, work was a core element within the Soviet penal philosophy and the underlying feature of the Soviet project as whole.<sup>115</sup> The ‘official’ language of punishment was coherent and in line with the political doctrine of Marxism in which prisoners were ‘discussed not as criminals in need of punishment but as fallen comrades in need of correction’

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<sup>114</sup> A Russian slang meaning a con.

<sup>115</sup> The glorification of work took place through the visual reproductions (see Bonnell, 1997) and the media. For example, a media cutting from a Latvian newspaper ‘Cīņa’ from 1948 reads as follows: ‘Work – the organisational principle of our lives, the creator of our today and our tomorrow. Only through work can we construct values that will enable our country to develop in to an unconquerable socialist fortress (Buholcs, 2005, cited in Eglitis, 2011, p.436).

(Piacentini, 2009, p.86). Nevertheless, that was an ‘officially’ idealised view of imprisonment and the accounts of those who experienced Soviet imprisonment evidence crude and punitive realities that contradict the official discourse (Akhmatova, 2004; Celmina, 1986; Ginzburg, 1967; Solzhenitsyn, 1974). Soviet prisoners endured hunger and extreme workload as told by Eela, a female survivor, work was such that she cannot understand how people survived it: ‘not for a moment could you forget [that] you’re a vicious enemy of this working-class paradise’ (Kurvet-Käosaar, 2018, p.189). Similarly as recalled by one of my research participants - Emily - prisoners at the time were treated as nonhuman beings:

*‘You were nobody – you were zeka- yeah zeka, that’s all... they were not talking with you, yes, like now - well like calmly... they were simply barking at you just like dogs... that’s it you are no longer a human being you really understand it... we were afraid... even from a prison guard.’*  
(Emily, prisoner of 1 year, repeater)

After Latvia obtained independence and control over penal practices in the early 90’s the Soviet legacy continued to influence life in custodial institutions. Even if the idea of the prison as a large scale factory was abandoned, the notion of ‘keeping prisoners busy’ lived onwards (this point will be further developed in the next Chapter). In addition, there is one ‘surviving’ factory engaged in traditional trade that operates within IWP also during the Soviet period. It is a sewing factory in which as claimed by some prisoners: *seamstresses earn pennies and are enslaved in work – you can’t miss a day* (Victoria). Similar claims have been made about realities of a penal colony in Russia, ‘where prisoners are forced to make clothes for the Russian market in slave

conditions' (Tolokonnikova & Žižek, 2014, p.8). Despite the fact that women were paid depending on their outputs, on average<sup>116</sup> it was the best paid work in the prison:

*'Here nobody pays you because you are just there unlike outside. Here you need to work... If you produce less you are paid less. It is an art and a talent.'*

(Lidia, prisoner of more than 9 years, first timer)

Women prisoners can choose to do two shifts instead of one in the factory, which amounts to prolonged working hours. In fact it was recognised that during Soviet times prisoners could earn better wages and the quality of the produced items was remembered with honour and pride:<sup>117</sup>

*'We were sewing for export! [with pride remembering the great production line] Everyone had work in the end employment is the most important here... people get some cash for it... (researcher: didn't you earn less during the Soviet Union?) What a foolish thing to say... everyone starting from grannies to the disabled worked. 1,600 people all worked, they were assured of work... people were going out with money.'*

(Emily, prisoner of 1 year, repeater)

Some of the most experienced prison staff also have said that during Soviet times prisoners were paid according to their outputs. There was a set target that needed to be fulfilled by 100%; if the target was achieved by only 90%, sanctions were imposed. For example, prisoners could be banned from going to the prison shop.<sup>118</sup> It was also possible to buy items from other workers to meet or exceed the targets and wages were increased if the targets were exceeded. In addition, prison staff also had an incentive to

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<sup>116</sup> According to internal documents the average monthly wage in 2015 after tax within the sewing factory was 103.17 euros whereas in the housekeeping department (prison maintenance) it was 73.12 euros.

<sup>117</sup> This ostensibly captures well the ideological backdrop that permeated the Soviet social fabric - people were proud builders of communism.

<sup>118</sup> Although I was told that there was not much what to buy (see also Celmina, 1986).

meet those targets set by the central administration in Moscow as prison staff received an additional pay or so-called ‘13th pay’ at the end of the planning year. Currently prison staff do not receive any incentives as the factory is managed by a private business owner who consequently reaps all of the profits from production. Prison staff joked that the business owner literally waited for when the good seamstresses re-entered the prison, hoping that they would not stop coming back. It was also pointed out that only good seamstresses are allowed to work, but not every woman could meet the required standards:

*‘We have a commercial enterprise here and it won’t keep a person if she works badly... because the entrepreneur wants profit... but there are people who have never worked in their life, they have no skills, no experience.’*  
(Zinta, prison staff, authority)

The prison sewing factory was the largest employer in IWP, which could be seen as the continuation of the Soviet past. However, the current system imposes constraints as not everyone is deemed to be ‘fit for work’ and only those who can generate profit are employed. There are multiple other paid work opportunities, which will be discussed in the next Chapter, and women can also receive financial support from members of their family.<sup>119</sup> Financial and other forms of material support can be vital for those women who lack certain skills or work ethic, which is necessary for employment. Moreover, as the current system allows prisoners to create places and be in charge of their ‘temporary homes’ any material support is welcomed. Consequently the next section aims at investigating the notion of creation of place or how women can

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<sup>119</sup> Financial transactions become more feasible as no food parcels are allowed and the current costs of travel from remote areas are high. This can be seen as one of the consequence of the market driven economy in which the availability of financial resources determines people’s mobility. As suggested by Shamir (2005, p.205) the mobility gap appears as mobility is not equally available, especially for those at the lower end of the mobility gap who lack ‘access to the resources required for mobility’ and too frequently family members of prisoners fall within this category.

exert their agency and create home-like cells, which are intertwined with the gender specific 'gentrification' that takes place alongside.

## 6.6 The Creation of Place

<i>I would call it a temporary home here.</i>	<i>These are our homes, our temporary homes.</i>
(Bella, prisoner of 2 years and 4 months, first timer)	(Mary, prisoner of 1 and half years, first timer)

Women should be seen not only as disempowered and constrained but also as active agents (Bosworth, 1999) who engage with the creation of place (Fiddler, 2010). As highlighted by Sack (2003, p.4) 'humans are incapable of accepting reality as it is, and so create places to transform reality according to the ideas and images of what we think reality ought to be'.<sup>120</sup> In the context of imprisonment, prisoners tend to make a cell personal and home like, which is a common practice regardless of the type of prison, its location and whether it is a male or a female institution (see Baer, 2005; Dirsuweit, 1999; Sibley & Van Hoven, 2009). Although at first this might not seem as something significant it is a manifestation of human power (Sack, 2003). The objects within the cells 'hold layers of meaning' and the visual imprints can reveal much about the daily life in prison (Baer, 2005, p.209). For example, as mentioned previously the use of cardboard boxes as storage units has a specific meaning for prisoners (as discussed earlier) and additionally this practice can be variously interpreted by observers from seeing this as pragmatism and the continuity of the Soviet preference of functionality over aesthetics, enforced 'equality' or purely it can be perceived as humiliation in action.

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<sup>120</sup> This also reveals the difference between space and place, although both terms tend to be used interchangeably. As defined by Fiddler (2010, p.6) space is more abstract and can be understood in terms of a geometric area, whereas 'making space into place requires intervention'.

Nevertheless, as in ‘carceral collectivism’ many people share the same cell this implies that multiple places are being created and coexist at the same time with multiple objects carrying diverse meanings (see Baer, 2005). During my fieldwork I observed that cells were decorated – women used whatever material possible to make cells look more colourful and visually appealing, thus a considerable attempt was made to ‘gentrify’ the environment (which will be discussed in the next subsection). There were also many flowerpots used to bring some greenery within their ‘temporary homes’. Thus, the grim material environment was enhanced by colourful personal belongings and flower pots, which, as argued by one of the prison staff, has become an obsession. She referred to it the ‘mania of flowerpots’ whereas others mainly were complementary about this practice perceiving it as a way in which women could express themselves and their femininity. It was also pointed out by the prison staff that the prison material environment does not determine the people but the people are in charge of determining the environment: *‘premises are not colouring people but the people are colouring the premises’* (Zinta).

Many imprisoned women indeed preferred to use the word ‘home’ instead of ‘cell’, similarly as found in penal institutions in Russia by Pallot and Piacentini assisted by Moran (2012), which also signifies their attachment and relation to the place as suggested by Annie: *‘here they allow us to feel at home, they don’t oppress us... you feel at home here... they think about us they create such conditions in which we can feel as if at home’*. In addition prison staff have also been praised for allowing and even assisting in making cells more ‘homelike’. This seems to be rooted in gendered assumptions that creating a ‘homelike’ visual appearance is more important for women than men (as discussed in Chapter 4 (see Zedner, 1998)):

*'There are a lot of rooms here that remind you of a flat... It's not like the administration is doing it, we are doing it ourselves. Of course, the administration is allowing us to do it because they understand we are women we like, for example, that little pillow that is forbidden we want that little rug, we want to make our beds look nice so that would remind us of this feeling of home. It is one of the important things... You don't have just bare walls and the bed. It would irritate you.'*

(Sarah, prisoner of 9 and half years, repeater)

*There are improvements you can see how they [staff] are trying also the educators are thinking how it's better for us. They bring some stickers... They understand that these are our homes and they help us as humans (researcher: do you really have this home feeling?) Yes, of course. I enter the section and I have my bed and a cupboard straight away. You make your corner I'm not interested what is there further away even if it is one big room.*

(Flame, prisoner of 1 year and 5 months, repeater)

Although some women complained about staff being inconsistent with their requirements and it seems to be a common complaint among prisoners in various jurisdictions (see Crewe, 2015; Sparks, Bottoms & Hay, 1996), which allegedly creates insecurities that stem from a 'discretionary style of governance' (Crewe, 2011a, p.513). One shift worker would allow and tolerate certain 'decorations' whereas another one would not. For example, it is common practice to use blankets to decorate the walls but some shift workers would demand to remove them. This led to complaints from the women:<sup>121</sup>

*[She pointed to the blanket on the wall and asked] why one shift allows a blanket on the wall and another asks to remove everything? Why should we look at those bare walls?*

(Kelly, prisoner)

*Everyone here works differently... I don't know who is right from all of them... I cannot judge that... some are saying you need to do this the other tells you differently. (Felicity, prisoner of 1 year and 3 months, repeater)*

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<sup>121</sup> Some of the quotes are from informal conversations with women and for this reason the length of imprisonment and whether this was their first or repeated time in prison remains unknown.



Thus, there might be some limitations to prisoner creativity and agency but overall it seems that there are practices in place that allow for creating ‘your own corner’, thus it can be argued that new spaces can be formed with new meanings (Dirsuweit, 1999). Sibley and van Hoven (2009) argue that this creative ability not only serves as a coping mechanism but also challenges the notion of prison producing ‘docile bodies’ and ‘transparent space’ as suggested by Foucault.<sup>122</sup> Similarly Dirsuweit (1999, p.75) saw this practice as a form of resistance through ‘the assertion of identity and the reclamation of space’.

In the Latvian context the reclamation of space seems to have a broader implication not only to their individually created ‘corners’ but to the whole cell as women seem to be in charge of regulating who can enter it. During my fieldwork I observed how prison staff politely asked if those who are in the cell would accept another women, which aligns with Sack’s (2003, p.98) argument that a ‘place is a manifestation of human power and it enables us to exercise power’. Also as confirmed by women the exercise of power can involve setting ‘inclusionary’ and ‘exclusionary’ tactics for controlling who enters their temporary ‘homes’:

*She was kicked out from downstairs... they didn't want her and that's all... nobody wants to live with her... they didn't even let her in... [she was sent to a cell upstairs where she wasn't let in]... she is such a person that nobody wants.*

(Felicity, prisoner of 1 year and 3 months, repeater)

Also women themselves have some discretion over cell transfers and they can refuse to be moved to a cell in which a person with a ‘bad name’ stays:

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<sup>122</sup> Nevertheless, Foucault (1978, p.95) also argues that ‘where there is power, there is resistance’.

*Three weeks ago... they wanted to transfer me with the dirty one... I said I'm not going... she has walked around and nobody wants to take her... bad name.*

(Amanda, prisoner of one year and 2 months, repeater)

However, while this might imply the assertion of power and agency it is also a sign of abuse. In fact violence and abuse between prisoners tends to be unseen and unheard by prison staff and while greater agency by prisoners in 'carceral collectivism' might seem as an empowering aspect there is also a darker side to it, which contains emotional violence and abuse. Those who fall victims to it are often expected to keep silent under unwritten 'prison rules':

*You are 24 hours together with those people. There are few possibilities to avoid the verbal abuse. I suffered a lot. Unwritten prison rules that you can't look for protection... Sometimes the emotional pain is worse than the physical pain... I was talking to the administration about what happened but they were asking why I didn't tell them this before, why, why?... because it is like this... I was at the medical section for three months. (researcher: was it then something serious?) Yes, my organs were failing I couldn't eat, sleep... why I didn't tell anybody because I had to stay here.*

(Mary, prisoner of 1 and half years, first timer)

Thus, while a women's prison might be deemed less violent than their male counterparts (Liebling, 1994) women do engage in acts that harm others (Britton, 2011). As Hannah-Moffat (2010, p.198) argues it can be problematic to characterise women as 'relational, victimised, maternal, nurturing and disadvantaged' as even if many of these feminine subjectivities apply women are also 'risky, hedonistic, irresponsible and undisciplined'. Some elements of violence and coercion are inevitable especially within 'carceral collectivism' as prisoners share dormitory type living arrangements and actively engage in enforcing order (which might be aligned to the official regulations or their own understanding of order and justice). Thus, even if women are removed from

the world outside they engage in creating their own world and rules – the world within this confined space has a ‘life’ of its own:

*‘It’s the kingdom of Ilguciems... We are living in a closed environment... it’s a world on its own... it’s a world within a world.’*  
(Zinta, prison staff, authority)

*You live in your own world... the association is with the cosmos but it is a world... a world created by us.*  
(Flame, prisoner of 1 year and 5 months, repeater)

Nevertheless, women’s agency is shaped by the prison administration as well as other prisoners and the next subsection looks into gender specific gentrification that takes place inside a women’s prison.

### **6.6.1 Physical Space and Gender Specific ‘Gentrification’**

It seems that prison space might have both effects of disempowerment and empowerment, which highlights the paradoxical and contradictory nature of imprisonment (see Liebling, 1999). The agency that women exert over their cells within ‘carceral collectivism’ is paradoxical but, of course, it might not function at all times independently from the institutional ambitions. Women are forced to conform or embody a specific ‘type’ of agency that adheres to the values of ‘‘proper’ femininity’ (Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2009, p.701) and sets suitable conditions in which women should live. This is reflected both within prison cells and the outside territory. The

general assumption is that women should have a different environment than men,<sup>123</sup>

more subtle, gentle, floral – embracing femininity and care:

*'We have a very soft territory, I like it. We have greenery, flowers everywhere it has an impact... It's cosy... we teach to care... for the surroundings.'*

(Zinta, prison staff, authority)

Similar findings come from Russia (Mordovia) where 'lace curtains, along with potted plants, famed pictures of flowers and landscapes, and pastel colours in the prisoners' living accommodation, were described as a means to "keep them feminine"' (Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2009, p.716). Moreover, order and cleanliness is a must and not an option. Women devote a substantial time to cleaning and in some units it is even embedded within the regime as there are 'official' days and times allocated to general cleaning:

*On Fridays we have a general cleaning, when we clean from the bottom to the top (researcher: only the rooms?) No, everything, each has their own allocated space, there are two people cleaning the corridor.*

(Cindy, prisoner of almost 2 years, first timer)

In addition to the general cleaning women tend to establish a daily rota, so each day one is responsible for cleaning the cell. Many conflicts emerge from housekeeping matters (see Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012) such as unsatisfactory 'standards' of cleaning or the delayed timing as shared by Bella:

*I didn't start to clean the room and she had a go at me, how come you are not cleaning... who are you to me, when I want I'll clean, if you need it so much, clean it yourself... I don't like it when I'm screamed at and forced to do something. Out of spite, I won't do it that's my character... nobody will*

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<sup>123</sup> This kind of approach has a long history across different jurisdictions (see Zedner, 1998) as discussed in Chapter 4.

*force me to do anything... Oh my God yesterday the room was cleaned... the dust can't even appear.*  
(Bella, prisoner of 2 years and 4 months, first timer)

As argued by Hannah-Moffat (2001) the forms of penal power can be both productive and repressive similar to agency that can be compliant and resistant and in this case the indication is of the latter. However, some prisoners might experience rage and become aggressive because of 'messy people' as shared by Felicity: *if [there is] a messy person... I'm shaking... I want to take a wooden board and hit her... she is eating bread and leaving crumbs behind.* Thus, for some it might be more difficult to bear 'carceral collectivism'. Prison staff also check if orderly living conditions have been observed:

*'Regarding cleanliness... the administration does checks, going around the rooms and looking at how clean and tidy the room is but again we don't have rooms where it's dirty.'*  
(Sarah, prisoner of 9 and half years, repeater)

Prison staff seem to set certain standards and expectations regarding how to live in cleanness, which imply tidy and orderly living arrangements with a 'feminine' touch that allegedly alleviates the 'weight' of imprisonment. This is in line with Bosworth's (1999) argument that femininity can play a paradoxical role within prison settings:

*Here it's orderly, tidy, nothing is thrown around. We show a good example for women here how to live a tidy life... In women's prison it's all more feminine – flowers, greenery so that it doesn't weigh on you, it's not so oppressive... Women are also busy with planting flowers and taking care of them.*  
(Ira, Prison staff)

Similar findings have been reported by other researchers of the post-Soviet space who suggest that physical space is used as a means to keep prisoners feminine (Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2009). While being in prison I also noticed that there were big wall

mirrors in each of the cells and when I looked surprised the prison staff explained that these are women and, of course, there should be a mirror in the cell. Dirsuweit (1999, p.75) has suggested that the prison attempts to inscribe discipline and feminised values on women's bodies through 'spatialised technologies' and the use of mirrors in the Latvian context can be seen as one such example as it ensures women's awareness of their body image and appearance at all times. As argued by Moran, Pallot and Piacentini (2009, p.700) the 'female body is a particular target of Foucauldian disciplinary power', which operates as a mechanism of social control. Hence, femininity is used as a form of disciplinary power, which 'produces bodies and identities and operates as an effective form of social control' (King, 2004, p.29). A specific focus is placed on outer appearance as the general assumption by prison staff seems to be that women should be persuaded 'to reintegrate into a recognisably 'feminine' form' (Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2009, p.700) and one of the prison staff suggested that it is an 'inborn necessity'<sup>124</sup> for women to use make-up and to look good. This can be referred to as 'beauty labour', which entails the notion that worrying about appearance is a woman's 'job' as 'a woman is simply not considered a woman if she does not worry about her appearance' (Porteous, 2018, p.413):

*'They are all women, mothers, sisters, young girls and of course this inborn necessity to look good, yes, some beautiful dresses, blouses some ribbons I don't know with eyeshadows.'*

(Zinta, prison staff, authority)

However, this seems to be one of the effects of the new regime as during the era of Soviet imprisonment 'femininity' was oppressed and women could not use make up

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<sup>124</sup> I recall this moment when she said this and I had no make-up on and, of course, I was not wearing anything nice either and it was quite awkward when she talked about all those broad assumptions of what women want and I looked (and felt) quite contrary to those expressed desires. This made me question my own femininity and the way I was perceived within this 'hyper feminine' world.

or dress in their personal clothes. When I interviewed a woman who had endured a prison sentence during Soviet times, she recalled that despite restrictions placed on prisoners they were creative and resisted these regulations by amending their uniforms (making them more fitted) and creating their own make-up and used toothbrushes to apply mascara and for eyeshadow using a colour from the wall:

*'Mascara we did ourselves, yes, you need eyelashes... we took laundry soap and made it liquid... burned... a packet of cigarettes... it was burned till dark ashes... you mixed it all altogether... and with toothbrushes... toothbrushes were even trimmed down... to apply... but for eyeshadows the wall colour as everything here was coloured... or grey or dark green.'*

(Emily, prisoner of 1 year, repeater)

While currently there are only some limitations on the use of cosmetic products, personal hygiene seems to be a greater concern. Of course, for some job roles in the kitchen, personal hygiene is a standardised requirement rather than an enforcement of a particular look, but it is important to point out that women are also introduced to a certain work ethic, which is part of the remit of resocialisation process:<sup>125</sup>

*If outside a person has been messy then here they learn to wash their hands, to brush their hair before work... For example, we teach that you can't leave your work for other shifts... there was a dishwasher... who left the wall dirty, then you say that you have to wash not only the dishes but also the wall... To cut nails... Our clients need to be instructed because there are a lot of things that they don't know it is a process of resocialisation.*

(Rubena, prison staff, authority)

This only highlights the different forms of knowledge, which are being 'transcribed onto the body of the prisoner' (Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012, p.16). Moreover, prison staff can rely on prisoner assistance in enforcing basic hygiene

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<sup>125</sup> The term 'resocialisation' is widely used in Latvia within the prison context instead of 'rehabilitation'. This seems to be a shared terminology also used in other post-Soviet countries (see Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012; Pallot, 2015).

requirements as multiple women share the same cell. Thus, there is a little leeway for disobedience – they can be forced by fellow prisoners to meet the basic requirements:

Researcher: *What happens if you don't wash?*

Prison staff: *Your cellmates will make you wash.*

Thus, it seems that to some extent 'carceral collectivism' by its design assists prison staff to enforce tidy and orderly living conditions as prisoner individual desires are controlled and appear to be subordinate to collective interests. There seem to be always some 'volunteers' who try to enforce personal hygiene by 'educating' the culprit:

*Once in my experience when I was put together with such a pig... She was picking up cigarette butts... and then sitting and eating bread with those black nails, I'm disgusted... From the beginning I was educating her... I told her that she stinks... then I said [to the administration] or you transfer her or I'll kill her... Now I'm also educating one girl in the cell... there is one stinky... I couldn't understand, does she have so many similar underwear?... all week she has the same ones... [now] all I need to do is to say that it stinks and she is running to wash, a very good girl, she runs and does things... But the one before she didn't listen to anything... she said that all smells are too much for me [that she exaggerates].*  
(Felicity, prisoner of 1 year and 3 months, repeater)

Low personal hygiene, similarly to findings from Russia, can be associated with a 'low social status' in the prison and those who lack means for accessing 'resources to maintain personal hygiene are publicly stigmatised' (Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012, p.209).

However, not all prisoners can be 'educated' in the same way - only those who are considered as weak undergo this ordeal, whereas others, similar to men (see Dirga *et al.*,



2015) might rely on their physical strength and authority<sup>126</sup> to avoid this even if there might be some issues with the personal hygiene and shared living:

*Here those are laughed at that really can't do anything. If you are stronger then even if you stink then she'll say quietly we need to kick her out from the cell but not loudly because she knows she'll get her face smashed in 'pa kupolu dabūs'.*

(Bella, prisoner of 2 years and 4 months, first timer)

This aligns with Sykes (1958) argument that violence can be used as a defensive threat it does not always have to be applied or enacted; it is sufficient if there is a potential threat of retaliation. Thus, within carceral collectivism prisoners can be more involved in the production of order and as suggested by Piacentini and Slade (2015) 'collective penal self-governance' includes re-casting prisoners into administrative roles and mutual surveillance (the latter will be further discussed in the next Chapter). The next subsection addresses some of the further blurred boundaries in places of 'difference', which create heterogeneous prison space that is governed by exceptions and difference.

### **6.6.2 Places of 'Difference'**

Prison is not just a homogenous space there are spaces of 'difference' in which different regimes and control mechanisms apply. One of the major indicators of spaces of difference is the blurred boundaries between the prison and the 'outside' world. There are certain spaces in which 'outsiders' are invited to meet the 'insiders', for example, prison visiting facilities (Moran, 2013a; 2013b). As acknowledged by Asare

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<sup>126</sup> Dirga *et al.* (2015) have linked the social hierarchy in male prisons to a range of resources – the physical strength, economic capital and psychological manipulation.

(2009, p.50) during prison visits, especially conjugal visits, you can feel as if you are among ‘your own people’ and as if partly you are at home and the home people are partly in prison – it is a place between the ‘zone’ and the outside in which ‘nobody really feels in their own skin’. As conceptualised by Moran (2013a; 2013b) those spaces are different as they do not follow either prison or outside rules – they are in-between both worlds and systems.

During my fieldwork I saw both the short and long visit facilities each of which has the capacity to accommodate four visits at a time. I had the opportunity to witness how some of the rules were ‘softened’ during the short visits and there seemed to be a more flexible approach towards rules or as prison staff commented many more stringent rules are bypassed and humanity prevails. When I asked about children and what they do if a child wants to be with a parent as there is a wall that separates the visitor from the prisoner the answer was encouraging: *we are also human, of course, we let them... There are rules but there is some leeway* (Marika).

In fact other places in which ‘insiders’ meet the ‘outsiders’ or those who are not part of the establishment can be referred to as places of ‘difference’, or as suggested by Moran (2013b) ‘liminal carceral spaces’. The prison school and the rooms for training in which teachers represent the ‘outside’ world could also be deemed as liminal carceral spaces. During my fieldwork I spent a lot of time in those spaces of ‘difference’ and I was particularly interested in how prisoners and prison staff navigate through this heterogeneous space. To some extent it can be argued that places of difference provide an escape route from the pains of imprisonment and an opportunity to experience a different reality (Crewe *et al.*, 2014b; Moran, 2013b). As admitted by Isobel, the school, for example, provides an opportunity to forget that she is in prison:

*Being in touch with the teachers, I have a lot of contact with people from outside and it gives me a lot. I forget that I'm in prison. I go out of the school and remember that I'm in prison.*

(Isobel, prisoner of 1 year and 1.5 months, first timer)

This highlights the importance of the interaction with the outside world through which prisoners can feel that they still remain a part of society and that they are not fully isolated and removed from the social body (Young, 1999b). As suggested by Bosworth *et al.* (2005) they might feel a bit less like prisoners and a bit more like human beings.

In addition, in the Latvian context it seems that those who teach at the prison school are expected simply to deliver classes without any specific training or induction, which implies that prisoners should be treated just as any other student. While doing my fieldwork I met some of the teachers who looked anxious on their first day of teaching and they found comfort in the fact that somebody from the 'outside', namely me, would be present in the class. Of course, officially I was told that all of the teachers had an induction but when I was there none of those who were teaching for the first time in prison went through it. During the interviews I found out that the women were quick to sense the fear that the teacher had, so induction was highlighted as a potential means for reducing this kind of fear as well as introducing them to the prison regime and the need to strictly adhere to the schedule or so-called routinised practice and activity (Sparks, Bottoms & Hay, 1996):

*Yeah as if she [teacher] was brought to ill dogs, she was scared that someone could attack her. You need an induction so that you are not afraid [and you know] that everything is safe.. There should be an induction for teachers as it is not as in a normal school where you can finish 10 minutes earlier, here you cannot, here there is a regime, the school regime cannot disturb the whole regime [of the prison].*

(Isobel, prisoner of 1 year and 1.5 months, first timer)

However, later Isobel added that in reality the school cannot be deemed as a safe place as there are no prison guards present or any CCTV available and this implies that this space is clearly left out of the reach of prison authorities and carceral power. This also provides an opportunity to maintain alternative cultures and a space for a different form of authority (see Crewe *et al.*, 2014b). Teachers were not provided with any information about the women and they did not carry keys or any other prison attributes. This alternative display of authority also led to a different pattern of behaviour as women seemed to be better behaved at school: *at school they are slightly better behaved, they come back and become more aggressive and want to show their power* (Dolly). In general, it resembled just an ordinary school - there were small classrooms dedicated to teaching sciences and other subjects. In fact, teachers even praised the women for being better behaved than students outside: *their attitude has been much better than on average in the school [outside], they were better behaved and more accurate during the practical tasks* (Lille).

In addition, the prison school is much more than just a place where academic knowledge is acquired, it is also seen as a hub for meeting other people from different units and finding out 'the news': *many of them do not perceive this as a school but as a place to spend their spare time, meet other girls on remand* (Isobel). By law there is a strict ban on communication between different security level prisoners but this requirement is not enforced when prisoners meet at school or work and these places serve as a general hub for socialisation and information exchange. Haney (2010, p.91) made similar observations in a Hungarian high security women's prison, where women used classes to 'escape from their grueling work lives and to bond with other inmates'.

However, there are multiple other places of ‘difference’ within prison, which do not necessarily meet the criteria of carceral liminal spaces as defined by Moran (2013b) but those places have distinct features that differentiate them from the ‘mainstream’ prison space. The youth section<sup>127</sup> is one of those places and also the mother and baby unit. Both units are located next to each other and share ‘enhanced’ living conditions in comparison to the ‘zone’ or the on remand sections. Thus as argued by Pallot and Piacentini assisted by Moran (2012) the protection of women or the entitlements within the carceral space can be linked to the traditional role of mother, carer and family nurturer through the ‘maternal mandate’. Latvian prison service, similarly to Russian, ‘attempt to create a space where women can realise the maternal role that society expects of them: where they can practise and perform motherhood’ (Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012, p.181).

The mother and baby unit was comprised of two sections. One section was split into individual rooms for mothers with infants (up to a year) and the other section was one big dormitory room in which mothers live with their children all together, thus the tradition of carceral collectivism has been maintained. In general, the prison environment seems to support normative femininity and while I was excited to hear that some prison staff could envisage Latvia without a women’s prison, this notion was rooted in normative standards of ‘motherhood’ and for the purpose of sexual reproduction:

*There are other functions for women so that they raise children and [contribute] towards creating Latvia... to give birth to healthy babies not ill ones. (Katja, prison staff)*

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<sup>127</sup> This unit is for twenty minors but at the time of my research there were only two to three girls there. However, this unit will not be further discussed as the focus of my research is on adult women but it is important to highlight it as one of the places of ‘difference’.

In addition to already mentioned places of difference, two further places will be highlighted.<sup>128</sup> There was one specific unit to which I did not have access, but it seemed to be run differently to other units. I was told that only those women who spend a prolonged period on remand and who were ‘trusted’ could live in this special unit as prisoners can move around freely there and prison officers do only hourly checks.

The other noteworthy unit is based on Christian values and offers up to 16 inmates a specially tailored ‘cultured space’ and the best possible conditions in prison – wooden furniture, matching bed linen and it is the the only place with washing machines - it was referred to as the prison’s ‘oasis’:

*There are neat conditions like nowhere else in prison. Only we have wooden furniture, wooden beds, very big wardrobes across the whole wall, four beds per room. We split the wardrobe into four. Night tables close to each bed, a big wooden table with four solid wooden chairs. In the zone we have iron beds, our stuff in carton boxes under our beds, maybe some stools, little tables... We all have similar bed linen as in a guest house. Every day we clean our rooms. There is no dust; in the zone you have it all... We have a washing machine, the only one in prison, where under my supervision we wash our clothes... This is the oasis as I call it!*  
(Mary, prisoner of 1 and half years, first timer)

As explained, the aim of this special unit is to lift women out from the prison subculture and provide a cultured place and constant ‘cultural offers’ in which women can flourish and embrace a new set of values. Thus, there seems to be an acknowledgement that the physical environment plays a significant role and that there should be this ‘cultured place’ for women to reside if any meaningful change is to be realised. However, only a few women have access to this ‘cultured place’ as certain criteria need to be met in order to qualify for this and other places of ‘difference’, and despite all of the invested

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<sup>128</sup> There are other places worth noting such as churches, prison medical section, library and the prison shop as they all share a common feature of lack of administrative control but due to the short time spent in those units and limited information provided by my research participants, those places will not be further discussed.

efforts in development of a new ‘cultured persona’, the question remains of what happens next?

This Chapter read as a journey through the prison space and therefore the exit is the end of the journey. For many who are located in this space the exit symbolises freedom and the end of ‘doing time’. However, for some the ‘real’ struggle of survival carries on afterwards on the other side of the wall. In fact, one of the saddest moments during my fieldwork was the release procedure:

*I recall one of the women being released and it was a very memorable moment – there she stood close to the prison gates, she was officially released and some final statements were read out, but she didn’t look excited or happy, her head was down and she looked quite sad, there was nobody who stood outside and waited for her – all she had was a small plastic bag... and off she went... it was sad.*  
(Field notes)

Unlike male prisoners, there are no long queues of partners outside prison gates either during their prison sentence or when they are released (see Pallot & Katz, 2017). Their husbands and partners usually walk out and abandon them (Alyokhina, 2017). Gendered cultural expectations continue to affect women’s and men’s imprisonment differently, and for women this often means the solemn journey through the carceral space. These very painful personal and physical realities shatter women’s lives making imprisonment harder to bear. Consequently imprisonment exposes women to greater harms and personal costs, which only contribute towards a more painful experience of imprisonment.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this Chapter has discussed the journey through the physical environment of IWP starting with the secretive and hidden geographical presence to entry procedures and the prison exit highlighting along the way the particularities of the prison layout and design, which have a substantial effect on how life in prison is experienced. Many of the impracticalities of IWP have originated from the Soviet selected opportunistic approach towards imprisonment. The adaptation of already existing buildings to prison needs have resulted in complex physical space, which is an additional burden for all those who share this environment due to the need to navigate through multiple storey detachment blocks and scattered or disorganised planning.

In relation to my overall research question this Chapter highlights how the physical environment of the prison can be seen as one of the most notable aspects of the Soviet legacy that still has a profound impact on the prison regime and day-to-day experiences. The difficulties faced by the women due to the physical realities of imprisonment add an additional layer to the pains of imprisonment but at the same time there are also some spatial ‘escapes’ or mitigating factors that have been introduced and extended since breaking away from the Soviet project. Women seem to be able to exert their agency and control by creating their own personalised ‘corners’ and determining who will be ‘included’ or ‘excluded’ from their ‘temporary homes’. In addition, the spatial heterogeneity and places of ‘difference’ can provide respite and different forms of agency and control. However, one of the main conclusions is that through the physical space the tenuous link to the Soviet past is maintained preserving visual reminders and carrying onwards the ‘Soviet spirit’ into the new millennium.



## **Chapter 7 The Prison Regime and the Continuation of ‘Carceral Collectivism’**

### **Introduction**

This Chapter seeks to explore the established prison regime and how prisoners recreate life inside the confined space. Prisons can be described as dark and immoral places (Scott, 2015) but they also contain courage, compassion and other moral values (Liebling, 2015). Thus it can be a highly contradictory place in which disempowerment and regulatory frameworks are met by resistance.

The first section of this Chapter considers the prison regime in transition or how the state of interregnum<sup>129</sup> (Bauman, 2013) was experienced ‘inside’. The liberation from the totalitarian state was simultaneously experienced on both sides of the wall - for prisoners this meant a transition from an inhumane and authoritarian prison regime, which relied upon the use of ‘hard power’ and strict military discipline, to the introduction of a progressive stage system and a gradual move towards a rights-based approach and the use of ‘soft power’ (see Crewe, 2011b).

The second section delves deeper into the ‘new system’ and its underpinning mechanisms of risk assessments (Hannah-Moffat, 2013; Liebling & Crewe, 2013), the promotion of individual responsibility, and appeal to self-interests (see Crewe, 2009; Kendall, 2002). This has considerably transformed life in prison, but while currently the emphasis might be on individualisation, the attachment to ‘carceral collectivism’ appears to be resistant to challenge (see Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012;

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<sup>129</sup> This was the period in the early 90s when Soviet rules broke down and the new rules were still to be created, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Piacentini & Slade, 2015). There seems to be intertwined struggles and subtle clashes between the ‘collectivist’ approach and the increasing pressure for individualisation (see Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012).

The third section investigates the notion of progression or the so-called ‘mobilitarian ideology’ (Mincke, 2017; Mincke & Lemonne, 2014), which encourages positive engagement with the system in order to obtain additional entitlements and to make progress through the system. This system ostensibly pacifies the prison environment but it also places a higher pressure on both the prison system and prisoners (Crewe, 2009). The prison system needs to ensure a constant ‘flow’ of available activities and programmes, which in the age of austerity and downward pressure on budgets can be challenging. Whereas for prisoners ‘quietly’ doing their time without rule violations is no longer sufficient for achieving progression; prisoners need to display an active engagement with the system to improve their skills and lower the risks of reoffending (see Bullock & Bunce, 2018; Kendall, 2002).

The final section aims to investigate prison exposure to market techniques and their consequences, as more and more privileges seem to be linked to access to financial resources. This potentially contributes towards the erosion of solidarity and mutual aid in the prison as the experience of imprisonment becomes differential and many privileges no longer depend solely on good behaviour but also require financial resources. Some of the entitlements become privileges for those who can afford them, emulating the world outside.

## 7.1 Imprisonment in Transition

Prisons tend to be reflections of ‘social, political, and cultural values’ (Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2009, p.701) and within the post-Soviet space during the 90’s the transition process had a significant effect on the way prisons operated. Zahars (2005) suggests that prisoners interpreted democracy and human rights as lawlessness (see also Krūmiņš & Pokšāns, 1996) or as noted by one of the prison staff members, the ‘liberation’ was experienced on both sides of the wall:

*‘The awakening did not start only outside... the awakening only in inverted commas also started in prisons... and it was the awakening in their [prisoner] sense of understanding.’*  
(Dina, prison staff, services)

Women who served their time during this transition period recalled that these were very different times in which they could enjoy some of the ‘liberties’; this seemed to be the time of interregnum (Bauman, 2013) as the old rules in prison no longer applied but the new ones were yet to be devised. One of the prisoners shared that in the mix remand facility there were connected cells: *‘so that they could visit each other, socialise as at the time... there was everything indeed everything available... drugs, alcohol... everything that you wanted’* (Emily).

Thus, prison staff lost control, to various degrees, over what was happening inside prison and prisoners were able to do what they wanted without fear of severe repercussions or obstacles to progression, as at the time the progressive stage system was not yet in place:

*‘Previously when I was sitting out [sentence]... it was a bit different... We were ready to go to the punishment cell ‘karcer’... to get reports but we did what we wanted... we did all sorts of things... previously there were no [progressive] stages... it was very good to sit out [your sentence]...’*

*Previously we did hooligan stuff oh what only we didn't do... we did as we pleased... we didn't give a shit what the administration thought.'*  
(Olivia, prisoner of two and ½ years, repeater)

However, this greater 'liberty' for some prisoners caused significant pain and suffering. As recalled by Binny during the 90s prisoner-on-prisoner violence was rife. The abuse she experienced in IWP ranged from emotional to physical and sexual violence and prison staff seemed absent or failing to intervene:

*[In the 90s] I was abused, they wanted to get me into bed I was young and didn't understand what was happening, it wasn't acceptable to me... I had herpes along the whole body there were also scars... it was from stress... I was very scared of prison... I was crying a lot... I wanted to be home.. they [prisoners] took everything away from me... the prison staff knew this but it was a different system.*  
(Binny, prisoner of 3 years and 8 months, repeater)

Thus, the collapse of the Soviet project also saw the collapse of the strict prison regime and it became increasingly difficult for prison staff to manage the disintegrating prison estate. Crewe *et al.* (2014a, p.404) framework can be applied to conceptualise what happened during this period. This framework suggests that combined effects of the 'weight of imprisonment' ('heavy'/'light') and the 'absence'/'presence' of the prison staff authority can determine the state and nature of imprisonment.<sup>130</sup> By applying this framework, it can be argued that the weight of imprisonment in Latvia during the transition period started to move from 'heavy' to 'light' as the strict prison regime collapsed. Whereas on the 'absent-present' continuum the shift was towards 'absent', as prison staff lost their power and authority becoming more absent and incapable of

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<sup>130</sup> Crewe *et al.* (2014a, p.404) have developed a four-quadrant framework, which is formed by two perpendicular continuums one representing a move from 'heavy' (a prison, which is: oppressive/ confrontational/ intimidating) to 'light' (staff being: relaxed/ co-operative/ approachable) and the other from 'absent' (staff being invisible unavailable and insecure to 'present' (staff visible, available and confident). Thus, as a result four quadrants emerge: 'heavy-present', 'light-present', 'light-absent' and 'heavy-absent', which represent four different types of prison environments.

dealing with prisoner transgressions. This for prisoners meant greater ‘liberty’ and more frequent prisoner-on-prisoner violence. The dangers of excessively light prisons were pointed out by Crewe *et al.* (2014a) as the under-use of power by prison staff can lead to greater prisoner-on-prisoner violence and disorder.

The prison estate at the time was in crisis and this was further deepened by the rapid de-industrialisation process. As told by staff prison factories were closed down and production lines discontinued (see Zahars, 2005). The removal of the core element of the Soviet prison regime created disarray in the whole system but various alternatives were sought for normalising the situation in prisons. Offsite work was used for keeping prisoners occupied, but this practice led to the creation of ‘illegal’ prisons outside prison boundaries that eventually caused several controversies and suspensions (see Galzons, 2005). As noted by one of the prison staff offsite work was used as a substitute for the employment system that had been dismantled within prison boundaries:

*There was offsite work. Women worked... Now there is no such a thing as offsite work. They were taken to factories. We didn't have work [inside prison], all contracts were terminated.*  
(Rita, prison staff)

However, while the Soviet regime was falling apart, the Soviet-trained prison staff attempted to uphold the prison system during this turbulent period and some current prison staff members praised their efforts: ‘*it's good that they [the Soviet trained members of staff] didn't go away straight away... they at least could uphold those prisons*’ (Dina). This seems in a sharp contrast to other countries, for example, Poland, which during 1990-1991 dismissed 5252 penal service officers and recruited other 5861 (Szymanowski, 1996, cited in Krupnyk, 2018, p.118). There were no similar trends in Latvia, many members of staff chose to continue their work at IWP until the age of

retirement, and its workforce was changing gradually after the collapse of the Soviet project:

*'Those who worked in the Soviet times retired changing the employee mix and composition... it wasn't straight away, it happened step-by-step. It wasn't because we got independent and employees went away, no... some due to age... retired.'*  
(Zinta, prison staff, authority)

In fact, it seems that the LPA in general relied upon non-interventionist strategies leaving not only prison staff but also 'prison rules' to gradual erosion and change:

*Prisons have their own rules, we can't intervene, the administration can't control 'their rules'... we didn't try to dismantle it all at once... this process is happening gradually.*  
(Indy, prison administration)

The gradual and organic change that took place was mainly attributed to the new legislation as the national laws were harmonised with international standards (Kamenska, 2006). The international exposure and scrutiny led to increased prison transparency and accountability or as suggested by Katz and Pallot (2017) this can be viewed as the development of rights consciousness. Prison staff had to adhere to the new laws and regulations and they had to try to deliver punishment according to the legally prescribed measures, as explained by one of the staff members: *laws change so you adapt to that* (Laima). Prisoners shared similar observations that the prison staff who could adapt to the new approach continued to work in prison, but others who could not accept the new system left – the system 'cleansed' itself:

*'This administration adapted 'perestroilas'... Previously it was suppression... you could lie down like a dog with your hangover... now you want an ambulance, you'll get it - everything is very calm now... the workers within the system... it's like they have been swapped... With Europe we have grown... you can feel it a lot... structure changed and those who*

*could adjust... yes, and accept the new system [stayed]... those who couldn't, those who thought that we are nobody went away... they cleansed themselves (researcher: so there was no need to dismiss anyone?) No... they didn't cope you know... simply I know people... who worked... they simply said... you cannot return to the past... I cannot live through this.'*  
(Emily, prisoner of 1 year, repeater)

It was a very significant shift from a system in which prisoners were treated as nonhumans (see Akhmatova, 2004; Ginzburg, 1967; Solzhenitsyn, 1974) and the prison administration was always right to a system in which prisoners could exercise their legal rights and negotiate their life 'inside'. While both prisoners and prison staff suggest that the prison system has significantly changed, it is essential to look into what lies beneath the current rights-based approach towards imprisonment and how this is exercised. Therefore, the next section of this Chapter further scrutinises life 'inside' and how this 'new system' contributes towards a specific way of organising of prison life, which similar to other jurisdictions, adheres to the 'mobilitarian ideology' (Mincke, 2017; Mincke & Lemonne, 2014), and neoliberal principles of individual responsibility and appeals to self-interests (Bullock & Bunce, 2018; Crewe, 2009; Kendall, 2002; Wacquant, 2009; 2010).

## **7.2 The Prison Regime Under 'New Rules'**

After the collapse of the Soviet project the first substantial prison reform in Latvia took place in 1994 when the progressive stage system was introduced establishing closed, semi-closed and open prisons (Kamenska, 2006). In relation to women's imprisonment this meant moving away from one general prison regime applied to all women in IWP to a multifunctional prison system in which the prison was divided into

different zones (remand, high security and low security). Prisoners were encouraged to progress smoothly through the different spatially segregated zones and regime stages, and imprisonment became all about mobility and progression (see Mincke, 2017; Mincke & Lemonne, 2014). As noted by one of the prisoners, she suspected that the ‘newly’ (re)introduced<sup>131</sup> system, which enhanced individual responsibility and self-control, would change their life in prison:

*‘Previously there were no stages... now the administration have managed well... people know about stages... if you will commit violations you won’t go through them... you won’t go ahead... with this they brought people down to earth... they made a very comfy system... When they started... those stages I understood straight away that... the system is being created... I knew that there will be something out of this... if previously I could do some hooligan behaviour with someone, now nobody will go for it.’*  
(Olivia, prisoner of two and ½ years, repeater)

The progressive stage system aims at introducing a reward system that ensures order and obedience (Taylor, 1998). This is achieved by promoting self-interest and self-regulation<sup>132</sup> and by shifting away from directly coercive measures and the authoritarian use of power that Crewe defines as ‘neo-paternalism’, in which power is ‘soft, but tight, with hard edges’ (Crewe, 2009, p.144; see also Crewe, 2011b). Individuals are responsible for their time in prison and the individualism is ‘at the heart of the formal, transactional ‘privilege’ system’ (Moore & Scraton, 2014, p.40). IWP staff embrace these principles in order to achieve rule obedience and prepare women for life outside:

*They don’t have a choice, they have to abide... so that they get home so that the sentence would be reduced... if you have 3 reports you are put in the*

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<sup>131</sup> The progressive stage system was first introduced in 1927 during the 1<sup>st</sup> period of Latvia’s independence (Luste, 2010).

<sup>132</sup> As discussed in the previous Chapter - even spatial arrangements help to achieve self-regulation.



*punishment cell, there you cannot smoke or watch TV, they are interested in obedience. They beg you not to write a report if they know that in other shifts they have had rule violations already.*

(Katja, prison staff)

Prison staff also acknowledged the central importance of explaining to prisoners how prison order was established: *the existing order will depend on the way you explained it* (Zaiga). This requires certain skills and knowledge, in particular when dealing with mental health issues, which are more prevalent among women prisoners than men (Borrill *et al.*, 2003; Corston, 2007; Liebling, 2009; Prison Reform Trust, 2019):<sup>133</sup>

*If you want to demand something first you need to explain – it is a big task to explain... you need to talk with a person, with each person you need to talk individually... The biggest hardships are to work with people with mental issues. They understand the information differently. A healthy person understands. With those [with mental issues] you need to spend more time to explain. There are none who doesn't understand at all but there are those with who you need to spend more time to explain. Everyone needs to be involved in explaining how the regime works.*

(Laima, prison staff, authority)

Moreover, as implied by Laima, it is not just the prison staff that should be involved in 'explaining' the prison rules, but everyone should be involved. Thus, the Soviet legacy of collective self-governance is still applied. In fact, it is common practice in 'carceral collectivism' to involve prisoners in explaining the rules and regulations, as well as taking on other duties, which ostensibly promote rehabilitation (see Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012). During my fieldwork, I frequently observed

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<sup>133</sup> While in the West there is a long standing history of medicalisation in relation to women's imprisonment (Carlen & Worrall, 2004; Carlen 1983; Sim, 1990; Worrall, 2002), this has not been the case in the Soviet or post-Soviet contexts. The scarcely available resources barely covered the basic medical supplies and medicalisation did not gain prominence. In IWP, for example, women with drug addictions cannot receive methadone or buprenorphine therapy unless they have received it prior to imprisonment; no new subscriptions were allowed while in prison.

prisoners being turned away by prison staff and being told to seek assistance from their fellow prisoners. The general assumption seems to be that the fellow prisoners can provide a valuable assistance to those in need:

*Prisoners are left to explain to one another what to do and how to write requests. Prison guards are not involved in this neither are educators as they don't have enough time to do so.*

(Field notes)

Therefore, both prisoners and prison staff are involved in order production, which is one of the Soviet legacies (see Pallot, 2015; Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012; Vavokhine, 2004) that continues to affect the prison regime and day-to-day life inside IWP.

However, different techniques are applied from those of the Soviet era for generating obedience and currently the 'responsibilisation' of prisoners lies at the core of the new system.

### **7.2.1 Bureaucratic Gaze and Responsibilisation**

Women prisoners seem to be aware of the 'bureaucratic gaze' under which their actions and attitudes are being judged (see Crewe *et al.*, 2014b). Their behaviour is constantly monitored and recorded within their personal files, which, as argued by Liebling assisted by Arnold (2004), should be seen within a broader 'compliance project' that seeks to 'responsibilise' prisoners and enhance self-regulation and control. This, as referred by Crewe (2015, p.56), is a form of 'tightness', which means 'passing greater responsibility onto the prisoner to self-regulate'. As shared by one of the prisoners: *I'm not aggressive... I react to everything calmly... I need to show that I'm*

*calm and not conflictual... it is written in our files'* (Annie). Women seem to be aware of the need to pacify their conduct and they fear more what will be written in their files<sup>134</sup> than the immediate punishment. This resonates with Crewe's (2011b, p.465) argument that officers often misjudge 'the power of the pen', which is enduring and cannot easily be erased and ultimately can determine prisoner's freedom.

Some of IWP staff seemed to be on a 'special mission' to responsabilise women: *the main point of my work is to make people responsible; to make them realise that they need to be in control of their lives and behaviour* (Eden). It is ironic that prison has become a place in which women can be taught to be 'in control of their lives'; prisons are well-known for being some of the most disempowering places in which prisoners lose control over their lives (Goffman, 1961; Scott, 2015; Wener, 2012). As shared by Lidia: *they deny us the most important thing – liberty. Here nothing depends on you* or as claimed by Olivia: *'the hardest is while you are doing your time nothing depends on you - nothing'*.<sup>135</sup> There seems to be a disjunction between how the administration represents prisoners' capacity to be in control of their lives<sup>136</sup> and the institutional reality of disempowerment and lack of control (see Haney, 2010). However, the rationale seems to be to ensure that women are able to live according to rules and fulfil their duties and similar to the world outside they need to demonstrate that they are driven and willing to achieve something:

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<sup>134</sup> This is particularly important for those women who aim to achieve early release, whereas those who for various reasons might not be eligible for early release tend to be less incentivised by this approach.

<sup>135</sup> See also Chapter 6 in which women talked about being 'pulled out of life' (Susan) and feeling that 'all your life is in that square' (Mary).

<sup>136</sup> Although some staff members mentioned the sense of disempowerment that women experienced while imprisoned, for example, Katja shared that it is a painful experience just to enter the prison, when everything is taken away from you.

*'Why are we asking to abide by the regime? So that they learn to live according to let's say schedules or rules, yes. That you need to go to work, it's mandatory. That you need to study... what your responsibilities are... the system is very good because people strive for something.'*  
(Zinta, prison staff, authority)

Women in Latvia, as in other jurisdictions, can feel disempowered by 'losing the means of controlling even the most routine events' (Moore & Scraton, 2014, p.40) but at the same time they are expected to take responsibility for their progression and proactively pursue resocialisation activities (see Bullock & Bunce, 2018; Crewe, 2009; Kendall, 2002). Obedience also ensures positive feedback and a low score on their risk assessment<sup>137</sup> (see Liebling, 2011a), which is of paramount importance for early release.

The same rationale ensures that women are less likely to be confrontational with prison staff, which to some extent assists in maintaining order, but at the same time some prisoners come to realise that they cannot achieve anything and they have to live by the rules of the administration as the costs of disobedience can be too high:

*There are girls who are afraid of it [to have rule violations]. They have five, six years [of imprisonment] they shouldn't be afraid. If there is a conflict with the administration and you know that you're right, that the administration should do something for you [you should fight for it]. On the one hand it's good there is some order but on the other you cannot achieve anything.*  
(Bella, prisoner of 2 years and 4 months, first timer)

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<sup>137</sup> In 2013 the government accepted the Cabinet of Ministers regulations No. 191 on the Procedure of the Implementation of Prisoners Re-socialisation, which required that the Risk and Need Assessment (RNA) is conducted for each prisoner upon entry into prison (Kamenska, Puce and Laganovska, 2013). In practice this means when a person is placed within prison, one of the first documents filled out by the psychologist, social worker and a senior inspector/educator (detachment head) is the RNA. These three specialists (but they can vary) are involved in drafting the RNA, which also includes a resocialisation plan that is reviewed every year. For example, all drug users are enrolled in drug awareness courses but they have free choice to attend them or not, but if they do not their progression through the system and eligibility for early release is impeded.

*It is the system, if you will not abide you will not have holidays, you will not receive early release, extra meetings... Why lose it all?*  
(Susan, prisoner of 8 years, first timer)

This highlights the increasing ‘tightness’ of imprisonment, which ensures rule obedience (see Crewe, 2015).

However, prisoners seem to have noticed a clash between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ systems, as the former was based on shared responsibility and collective punishments (Slade, 2015), whereas the latter highlights individual responsibility (see Crewe, 2009; Liebling, 2011a; Peck & Tickell, 2002; Wacquant, 2009). The profound differences of the underpinning principles in relation to responsibility could lead to conflicting outcomes. While the neoliberal trope of individual responsibility (see Crewe, 2009; Kendall, 2002; Liebling, 2011a; Peck & Tickell, 2002; Wacquant, 2009; 2010) seems to be well absorbed and voiced by prisoners: *but it is my fault for all of this* (Helen); *it is our fault that we are here* (Susan); *nobody forcibly called us here, it’s our own fault* (Elisa); *because of my lack of responsibility I’m here* (Amanda), on some occasions prisoners were still sharing collective responsibility, which they seem to find unjust. For example, if somebody fails to return to prison from a home visit the consequences are felt by all prisoners who are not allowed to leave for home after this kind of incident. Prisoners felt that this was unfair practice, as they had all worked hard to earn this privilege:

*People are suffering working the whole summer just to get an ‘acknowledgement ‘pateicibu’... If one is going out and doesn’t come back for a day... she gets a punishment cell... [other women lose the right to visit their family] Where do those hours that we work for free disappear? Thirteen people have to suffer because of one... They are telling us that everyone is individually responsible for themselves... but when something like this happen we are [collectively] held responsible.*  
(Kelly, prisoner)

Collective punishments could be seen as one of the many pains of imprisonment and one of the hidden cultural heritages;<sup>138</sup> proving that ‘carceral collectivism’ is resistant in the post-Soviet space (see Alyokhina, 2017; Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012; Piacentini & Slade, 2015; Tolokonnikova & Žižek, 2014). The collective nature of punishment seems to enhance an understanding among women of shared pain and sufferance, which generates the ‘truth’ or the ‘real’ within the prison context, as explained by Sarah:

*‘There are many things happening here - people are losing a lot, [and] finding a lot, they are managing their emotional problems and questions... The particular association is that here is the truth... because here everyone is by themselves. They are all the same, it’s not like one is better or worse. Everyone has their own problems, everyone feels bad, everyone suffers emotionally and spiritually and that’s what unites us... My association is with the truth with the real, with something that isn’t acted out.’*  
(Sarah, prisoner of 9 and half years, repeater)

This collective sense of unity ostensibly also empowers women and allows for a system of checks and balances to be created in order to uphold their rights.

### **7.2.2 Synopticon and Checks and Balances in Place**

Women are also keen to enforce their rights by carefully watching prison staff to ensure that they are fulfilling their responsibilities. This can be referred to as a form of synopticon in which many are watching the few (Mathiesen, 1997). One of the examples of a form of synopticon was illustrated by Beth, who suggested that educators are tightly monitored and they cannot avoid their duties:

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<sup>138</sup> Collective punishments in penal facilities predate the Soviet system (see Krūmiņš and Pokšāns, 1996).

*There was an educator who was afraid... she didn't want to see anybody... She was walking in on tiptoes so that the heels couldn't be heard, but there was a gap between the doors and when they [prisoners] saw her they screamed and everyone demanded her attention... if they don't fulfil their responsibilities why should we?*

(Beth, prisoner of 5 months, first timer)

Moreover, more experienced prisoners can be first to catch out junior staff for not observing the rules as initially they might not fully know all of the procedures and lesson can be taught:

*'Sometimes the young ones want to demand something from us but they are not doing their own job correctly, yes, if you have some allegations against me then I think you need to figure out if you are doing everything right in your work... because I will catch you before... that you didn't do something as it should be done... Of course, if I caught you out I won't run to complain about you, nothing I'll tell it to her 'you see I caught you! Then why are you like this to me? I can do this as well'. This is how I teach a lesson... if you want to chase after me watch after yourself, and don't do any mistakes.'*

(Olivia, prisoner of two and ½ years, repeater)

Overall it seems that everyone is trying to be vigilant. Prisoners have a particular interest in being observant - their vigilance allows them to navigate through the regime and negotiate some aspects of it in their favour. There are different shifts, which all vary in the strictness of the routine that they follow (see Liebling, 2000; 2011b). As shared by Olivia: *'there are some nuances when you live here you come to realise, which shift is harder and what they are focusing on... what they are paying attention to'*. This is in line with Bosworth and Carabine's (2001) argument that power negotiations in prison are rarely strictly linear and should be viewed as an ongoing process. This view was supported by both prisoners and prison staff:

*There are some understanding prison officers but there are some that aren't and you're likely to get a report. We watch who is on the shift [if they are an understanding one] ahh then we can sleep and you can negotiate everything but with others not.* (Isobel, prisoner of 1 year and 1.5 months, first timer)

*There are shifts where they can be more relaxed than others (researcher: how do they decide that?) They simply know in which shifts they will be able to do what... they test each of the new officers to see how relaxed or strict they need to be.*  
(Linda, prison staff)

In general, prisoners and prison staff shared the view that the prison system has become ‘softer’ which can be understood in terms of moving away from the austere and authoritarian prison management system to the system that applies relational elements or dynamic authority in order to enforce order.

### **7.2.3 Dynamic Authority**

The use of ‘softer’ approaches is encouraged for maintaining prison order. The so-called dynamic authority (Liebling, 2011b; 2014a) can be a vital tool for achieving this. By knowing well their prisoners and establishing good relationships with them, prison staff can achieve order and increase rule obedience within the prison as well as attaining greater legitimacy (see Bullock & Bunce, 2018; Crewe, 2011b; Liebling, Price & Shefer, 2011; Sparks & Bottoms, 1995). As acknowledged by one of the prisoners, if the prison staff have humane relationships and are approachable: *‘why would I violate a rule, no, I wouldn’t* (Sarah) or as shared by one of the staff members: *if you have respect for them they have respect for you* (Linda). Demands for reciprocal relationships seem to be one of the key changes within prisoner-staff relationships (this will be further developed in the next Chapter).

The use of dynamic authority implies using individually-tailored approaches when dealing with prisoners. IWP staff seem to try to work out each individual and apply



individually-tailored approaches as well as avoiding provocations and conflict situations:

*You need to find an individual approach for each prisoner (researcher: how to do this, did anybody teach you this?) No, you need to feel that yourself. How to talk... how not to provoke prisoners to conflict situations.*  
(Livija, prison staff)

Nevertheless, some of the more humanistically inclined members of staff also pointed out that prisoners need to feel that they are cared for and that their best interests are at the heart of the prison system:

*They need to feel that the person cares for them. I'm telling them, if I wouldn't care I could say nothing... I think only by explaining and talking [with women] without using authority. Only through talking and discussing... then a person needs to understand what they are doing and who needs it... A person cannot be told you'll do this! No, I won't do it! Everything in prison depends on staff culture [and] the level of education.*  
(Zaiga, prison staff)

This resonated with some of the ideas shared by prisoners that what matters the most is the 'human factor' or how prison staff treat prisoners (see Crewe, 2015; Liebling, 2011b; Sparks & Bottoms, 1995). If prisoners are humanely approached and asked to do something, this is more likely to produce better results:

*'When the administration is putting on pressure... If for example somebody comes up to me and asks me to do something... I live here, of course I have nothing to do here, I need to spend this time I'll do it. But when I'm told you ought to do something 'dolzna' I don't have to do anything to anyone... I ought to do my time... and that's all... The last word is mine... You always have a choice even here you have a choice. For me what is important is the human factor, it means to me a lot more that 'you ought to' I don't have to do anything for anyone... It's not difficult for them to say this word – please. It's not to beg us, no but a simple human factor.'*  
(Olivia, prisoner of two and ½ years, repeater)

The use of dynamic authority and the progressive stage system seemingly ensures order and produces better outcomes.

The ‘softer’ approach can be also seen in the administration of punishment for breaching the rules. If previously women were punished immediately without any warning, currently women are issued with a verbal warning instead of a punishment, which also implies the application of dynamic authority (see Crewe *et al.*, 2014a; Liebling, 2011b):

*‘From the beginning you are warned, previously you were punished straight away... without any warning. Now they babysit you, call your educator... you are called in for a talk.’*  
(Emily, prisoner of 1 year, repeater)

*‘The first punishment is limited to a ‘prophylactic’ talk (researcher: what is this talk?) This talk is before the warning... which goes in your case file... but it’s not a punishment... if you do something else then it’s automatically a warning... they [prisoners] like it as... there was a violation but no punishment.’*  
(Asja, prison staff, authority)

While women might experience a ‘softer’ approach towards rule enforcement through a greater application of the so-called ‘dynamic authority’, this does not mean ‘absence’ of prison staff control and oversight.

#### **7.2.4 Thorough Guarding**

IWP was referred to as the ‘red’ zone by prisoners, which, as found by Pallot and Piacentini assisted by Moran (2012, p.105), is a form of informal classification of prisons in which the ‘red’ zone implies that ‘the life of prisoners is strictly controlled by the penal authorities’. As shared by one of the prisoners: *the administration is*

*controlling everything here in the female prison and the law is being enforced* (Flame).

This is ensured through security measures and thorough guarding. As argued by Carlen (1983, p.102) women are not only incarcerated, but also ‘mentally and emotionally straitjacketed’ through a rigid disciplinary system.

Security measures and official procedures are taken seriously within IWP. If the internal procedures require that every single cell in the ‘zone’ should be searched twice per month for forbidden items this is followed. Although some of the prisoners were more sarcastic about the cell searches as prison officers look only into the most obvious places: *what kind of searchers are they when they [prison staff] look into your wardrobe and other obvious places where no prohibited items would be placed anyway* (Isobel). I made similar observations while shadowing prison officers:

*The cell search was perhaps the most interesting action today. It did remind me of what one of the prisoners told me about the ‘smunj’ - prison slang for a cell search. The prison officers indeed only checked in the most obvious places... beds, boxes, letters, medicine, clothes no obscure places were checked.*

(Field notes)

In general, prison staff shared a perception that women were less likely to pose a security threat (see also Britton, 2011; Chesney-Lind, 2006; Liebling, 1994; Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012). Some of the prison guards suggested that it is easier to work with women prisoners as they are less likely to create or smuggle some of the more complex prohibited items into prison or plan an escape:

*Women are less likely to create illegal items such as a tattoo machine, booze distiller and of course, they are less likely to plan an escape so they’re easier to work with.*

(Reyhan, prison staff)

*But women are not like men. Women can shout, hit someone, but not to plan an attack, it is more about emotions.*  
(Betija, Prison staff, services)

Nevertheless, as in other jurisdictions women prisoners seem to be punished for more trivial offences and as a consequence they can find themselves more frequently than men being subjected to disciplinary proceedings and solitary confinement for relatively minor offences that would otherwise be ignored in male prisons (Al'pern, 2004; Bosworth, 1999; Chesney-Lind, 2006; Howe, 1994). As suggested by one of the prisoners, reports can be obtained for any negligible rule violations:

*They shouldn't write reports for small things. If you do then it's absurd. If you get into a fight write it [a report] but not if you eat after 10 pm. Everybody wants home and if for such small things you get a report... you have been sitting there for so long and then you receive it and you can't open up [to move to the open section] and that creates a big pressure and then it starts, you hit and abuse the staff... I wouldn't write [a report] for such stupid things as bringing out potatoes [from the kitchen] giving a pencil, swapping shoes - I didn't give heroin. A report for those little things... this is only done in this prison.*  
(Flame, prisoner of 1 year and 5 months, repeater)

Reports can be removed after a fixed period of time depending on women's security level, as well as engagement with the prison authorities.<sup>139</sup> It is a three strikes policy; if a prisoner collects three reports, she is placed in a punishment cell for up to 15 days or in disciplinary isolation for up to 10 days. She might also have to go in front of the Assessment Commission, which could lead to a regime change (shifting from a low security to high). Consequently women need to maintain control and follow the rules in order to progress as well as avoiding being shifted backwards:

*'First report, second and a third then it is a serious violation and then you are put through the Commission and shifted back to the high security*

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<sup>139</sup> Reports can be removed sooner if prisoners engage in voluntary work.

*regime and you will sit there... till you cancel your violations. It's better not to try to break [the rules] because it affects your early release and your position... You need to hold your emotions and everything else, to hold it together... we are working on ourselves.'*

(Annie, prisoner of 3 years and 3 months, first timer)

Thus, those who want to progress need to hold everything together: *this is a place where you need to hold yourself together* (Bella), despite the abuse from other prisoners:

*You need to hold yourself together... you are being treated like a shit... a young girl can point at you with a finger... I was taught not to pay attention to anything... she is saying something and I pretend that I don't hear that, that it's not towards me and then I'm left alone.*

(Amanda, prisoner of one year and 2 months, repeater)

Some women who fall under 'maternal mandate' (Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012) (as discussed in Chapter 3) are exempt from certain punishments but all others who do not hold a 'maternal mandate' for serious rule violations such as fighting, are immediately placed in the punishment or disciplinary isolation cells. However, as many admit, these have become very rare events as it is seen as a sign of 'carelessness', afforded only by those who want to serve their full sentence.<sup>140</sup> By and large, prisoners supported the notion that: *nobody is doing something* [serious rule violations] *that would require to be passed further* [to the administration] (Miranda).

Women prisoners were not only thoroughly guarded against internal rule violations but also from external risk factors such as receiving forbidden items through the post or visitors. No items were taken for granted but thoroughly checked. All of the food supplies brought into prison by prison visitors for conjugal visits despite being

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<sup>140</sup> Although violence can be hidden - during my fieldwork I saw a woman who had serious bruising and it was quite clear that it was inflicted by somebody but she made up an unbelievable story of how she had sustained the injuries, which nobody seemed to question.

properly packaged and sealed were opened and tested. During my fieldwork I also observed how those searches took place and it was indeed a very rigorous process:

*The search of family members was very thorough, even kids shoes were removed and checked. Absolutely everything got checked – each product even if packed and sealed as in the shop. Each food container was opened and goods were cut into pieces, and the speed with which it happened was impressive.*

(Field notes)

On several occasions prison visitors pointed out that the security level seemed to be higher in IWP than elsewhere.<sup>141</sup> Prison staff seemed to be scrupulous in relation to security issues and some of the prison officers claimed that nobody could be trusted. Some members of staff shared their feelings of exhilaration and a sense of fulfilment if a forbidden item was found:

*'You shouldn't become emotional in any circumstances. There comes a sweet, old lady and brings socks to her daughter. Here you cannot be emotional, you cannot judge by appearance you need to look at everyone in the same way... to feel every hem till you find it. Rarely you find [something] but if you do find... then yes, you have such a sense of fulfilment.'*

(Marika, prison staff)

Moreover, it is not only about finding illegal and prohibited items but also about strictly adhering to official regulations, which, as argued by some prisoners, do not apply to the same extent in male institutions. Prison staff in male prisons seem to use more discretion than stringently following the official rules and regulations:

*For men... we brought two big bags of trainers... we gave everything to one person, nobody wrote any 'report'. Here I believe they wouldn't even accept it because of ten pairs... there were no problems [in the male prison].*

(Felicity, prisoner of 1 year and 3 months, repeater)

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<sup>141</sup> This resonates with my first day in the prison (as discussed in Chapter 5) when IWP visitors claimed that security wise this prison was the strictest.

Rule compliance and obedience is predominantly expected from women prisoners and additional home leaves and early release serves as an ultimate incentive.

### **7.2.5 Rule Compliance and the Final Reward of Early Release**

For many, getting by in a women's prison meant 'becoming 'submissive', 'passive' and 'compliant'' (Liebling, 2011a, p.537). Women prisoners saw themselves as more rule compliant than their male counterparts: *'there are internal regulations for order. We abide by them. Women, in general, are more obedient. They don't overstep limits and abide'* (Lidia). Abiding by rules is supposed to lead to the final reward of early release but this is by no means a certainty in IWP. As explained by Olivia, when it comes to the vital decision of early release it can go either way, despite exemplary conduct during the sentence, which women might later regret, when failing to obtain the desired outcome:

*'One thing people don't understand – they think if they behave... but they might also not let you go... people don't understand that those 5 years you need to sit... in silence... in the end you are not let out... it's unknown... everyone lives in hope... I'll do everything and go out early but whatever... you need to sit out all of the sentence... then you think oh gosh why didn't I... do this at that time, why didn't I do that anyway, they didn't let me go. Well, but what were you thinking before, it was clear anyway that when you arrive at the point [of early release] it's fifty-fifty.'*  
(Olivia, prisoner of two and ½ years, repeater)

Other women who went through this expressed their disappointment and disillusion with the system. Lidia, for example, shared her painful experience of being rejected for early release, which nullified all of her efforts of progression and was perceived as a large set back:

*'I tried hard I had a goal and now when I apply and they don't let me out I'm ruining my psyche 'portjitsa psihika'. Is this what people need? One is fighting and fighting and doing everything but nothing happens... Here you have this one chance. People need to be given a chance... How can I believe that I have a chance? I've been sitting here for 9 years... They hope that people will change here but if you are not given a chance how can you change?... You aim at something and if you apply for early release it is your aim, if you don't achieve it, it's counterproductive. If you are not let go then you have an empty head again, you have no goals.'*

(Lidia, prisoner of more than 9 years, first timer)

Crewe (2011b, p.458) suggests that this situation, when prisoners cannot rely on the system, can result in seeking 'ontological security in 'withdrawal', and more psychological comfort in abandoning expectations, than in chasing 'carrots' that might not be obtained'. Thus, currently the system installs the illusion that, if prisoners are well behaved, they can obtain early release but it does not seem to be the case for everyone who meets the systems' requirements. This is because ultimately it is the court that decides whether early release should be granted or not. Despite receiving a positive assessment from the prison, the judge that takes the final decision on early release might not be in favour of a prisoner's release. All aspects of sentencing still remain a matter for the courts, which not only consider women's behaviour in prison, but also external circumstances and socioeconomic factors such as family circumstances and a potential for employment - domains which tend to be more precarious for women than men (see Alyokhina, 2017; Pallot & Katz, 2017; Sharpe, 2015). It should be also pointed out that unlike in other European jurisdictions where prisoners can be released automatically halfway through their sentence (see Padfield, van Zyl Smit & Dünkel, 2010) in Latvia such measures have not been implemented.



In fact, during my fieldwork I had an opportunity to observe prison court proceedings in which early release was granted and those were some of the most remarkable moments that I was able to share:

*When the first woman walked in I recognised her... She looked very scared but when she spoke it was a very emotional appeal... when the verdict was read out in favour of her early release she broke down in tears and loudly expressed her gratitude to the judge... I got emotional too... Even the judge couldn't look at her – she looked down at her paperwork... when those emotions are real everyone can feel them... During the court proceedings there were multiple other cases looked at that day and in total two of the applicants for early release were successful. Afterwards one of the successful applicants was so happy that she hugged the prison staff and me.*  
(Field notes)

As later claimed by prison staff, this judge in particular did not grant many early releases so such positive outcomes were not expected and to some extent it was attributed to the presence of an external observer - *I can't remember when this judge has ever let anybody out... maybe there should always be some external observers coming* (Zinta) [in reference to my presence].<sup>142</sup>

This also evidenced the close relationships that some of the women and prison staff might develop, and to some extent highlights how much some of the prison staff feel involved in this process and that they do care for the outcomes of the court proceedings. Sometimes prison staff seemed to emphasise that only they seem to care about women and their lives as outside 'nobody cares' (this will be further developed in the next Chapter).

The progression through the prison system is very important in order to qualify for early release. The internal mechanism for progression is the Assessment

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<sup>142</sup> For the first time I realised that I could have a meaningful impact on life 'inside' while doing my fieldwork and this awareness made me feel much better about the research process.

Commission<sup>143</sup> in which decisions are made about re-categorization or moving prisoners to a different regime level. This embodies Mincke's (2016, p.26) argument that 'being a prisoner is no longer a state but a path'. As explained by a member of staff the main aim of the Commission is to assess whether a prisoner is sufficiently engaged with the offered activities and the resocialisation process. Women need to be actively engaged and it is not sufficient if they are 'quietly' doing their time without rule violations - women are expected to 'earn' the progression:

*'The Commission... evaluates... that you study, take part in activities... the Commission sees that the person wants to change something... then you move upwards... everyone can apply for it, it doesn't matter if you do something or not... if the Commission sees that you don't do anything, that you quietly sit in the cell... that you have no achievements... that you have done nothing for yourself... Well then... you will remain on the highest security... If you have understood something you can re-apply'<sup>144</sup> ... the Commission will see... the positive change... and of course she'll be transferred... she'll feel that she has earned it.'*  
(Zinta, prison staff, authority)

As with court proceedings the process of going through the Commission seemed a very stressful and humiliating experience for women. During my fieldwork on multiple occasions I had an opportunity to observe the Commission:

*Women were called in one by one and they had to stand in front of the Commission'<sup>145</sup> - they had to say their name, personal code, the article under*

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<sup>143</sup> The Commission consists of five people - the prison governor, three heads of department and one member from the LPA. As acknowledged by prison staff the composition was more diverse in previous years as there used to also be members from the Probation and the NGO's but the reduced involvement from other agencies was perceived as a positive change because prison staff felt they knew the women and their motivation better, which to a newcomer might not be always obvious. It used to be called the Administrative Commission and this name was still used interchangeably with the Assessment Commission during my fieldwork.

<sup>144</sup> Women can re-apply after a three months period.

<sup>145</sup> It was interesting that there was a chair provided but women could not walk in and sit on it they had to remain standing in front of the Commission. However, there were some 'rebels' who knew well the proceedings (it was not her first time in front of the Commission) but she sat down immediately after entering the room proving the point that there is always a choice. I also observed that some women

*which they were sentenced, when their sentence started and allegedly finish. Then a separate panel consisting of prison staff read out loud the prisoners' case file with a particular focus on engagement with the resocialisation process – undertaken studies, work, relationships with the staff, rule violations and acknowledgements. Based on information provided prisoners were further questioned about how they plan to deal with their problems and in what kind of activities they plan to be engaged in future but I did not witness any refusals as all of the women seemed to be 'engaged' with their resocialisation process. I could see how nervous they were and what it meant to them. Some were shaking, some nervously smiling – each woman displayed a different reaction and every single one cared for the outcome of this process.*

(Field notes)

As acknowledged by many women, it does not matter if you are going through the Commission for the first time or repeatedly, it is a very unpleasant and stressful experience. But for other prisoners in the 'zone' the day of the Commission, just as in court proceedings, seems to be a special day as it implies a movement, which, as explained by one of the prisoners, can liven up the zone and provide some kind of change in the routine day-to-day existence:

*'There are days of transfers when for example [prisoners] come from remand to the zone or days of Commission... when it's all... like in movement... the zone again is alive... who will be living where... who is coming? ... It's interesting.'*

(Sarah, prisoner of 9 and half years, repeater)

The prison internal mobility has different layers of meaning. Firstly, it can be welcomed by those who long for a change in the seamlessly monotonous enclosure. Secondly, the 'mobilitarian ideology' contributes towards prison legitimacy, as immobility can be seen as a danger because it leads to 'a desynchronisation with the society' (Mincke, 2017, p.245). Thus the prison environment is brought in line with the outside world through the 'mobilitarian ideology'. Women are encouraged to strive for

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were honestly replying to the questions and they were not penalised for doing so and even if the answers were not favourable for the administration, the progression was granted.

mobility and progression that is based upon a participatory logic in which prison-time should be used for prisoner self-improvement and prisoners are responsible for assigning the meaning to the prison sentence (see Bullock & Bunce, 2018; Crewe, 2009; Mincke, 2017). Therefore, the next section looks at the available resocialisation programmes and other activities within IWP as they seem to be a mandatory part of the progressive stage system despite being disguised by the language of voluntary engagement.

### **7.3 Keeping Prisoners ‘Busy’ and Gendered Activities**

The Department of Resocialisation at IWP was allocated the task of keeping women busy and engaged with activities. This overarching strategy of keeping prisoners occupied as suggested by Mathews (1999, p.67), can be viewed as one of the indirect control strategies that tend to be hidden but nevertheless ‘central to the construction of order’. The preoccupation with keeping prisoners busy is particularly prominent within post-Soviet jurisdictions in which genuine free time is reduced to a minimum (see Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012).

Nevertheless, while penal labour has been central for the concept of punishment in different periods of time and in various jurisdictions (as it was discussed in Chapter 4) the techniques of enforcing this notion have changed. While, for example, the Soviet prison regime enforced hard labour through obedience and strict discipline, coercion and harsh punishments (see Celmina, 1986; Ginzburg, 1967; Solzhenitsyn, 1974), the current system relies on what Crewe (2009) has described as binding prisoner desires to institutional ambitions. This implies working towards a mutual understanding of what is

beneficial for prisoners and the difference lies in the apparent voluntary submission to the institutional objectives instead of coercion-induced obedience and submission, which was prevalent during the Soviet regime. It can be argued that ‘work becomes part of the prison’s power-submission dynamic’ (Haney, 2010, p.76; see also Tolokonnikova & Žižek, 2014):

*‘We are organising work... so that the clients are kept busy all the time with something useful... In the Soviet times it was... like forced... [Now] it is a free choice... with this free choice you have to make them understand that they need it... It takes time for people to understand that they need it and we help them to understand that... The idea is the same but in those days it was obligatory... now it is like voluntary.’*  
(Zinta, prison staff, authority)

Prisoners also prefer to be occupied. This can be an important aspect for surviving imprisonment as activities and employment can provide new identities (Crewe *et al.*, 2014b), give the possibility of dissociating from life in prison and reflexivity (Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012) and produce spaces of privacy and solitude (Milhaud & Moran, 2013; Moran, 2013a). Similarly, some of the prisoners in IWP were expressing their satisfaction with work as it provides: ‘*some time and space to think*’ (Andzelika) as otherwise, similarly to other jurisdictions, which adhere to ‘carceral collectivism, ‘prisoners are always in a crowd’ (Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012, p.113). Many prisoners in IWP just like in other jurisdictions (see Schinkel, 2015) embraced the importance of keeping themselves occupied so that time passes quicker and they learn something:

*Well this time, those five years passed quite quickly because I always kept myself busy, I’m not just sitting here... I’m either studying or working.*  
(Teresa, prisoner of 5 years and 4 months, first timer)

*I'm very busy... I go to sleep at 10 pm like dead... When you are busy with doing useful things then everything goes quickly.*  
(Binny, prisoner of 3 years and 8 months, repeater)

*It depends how you frame yourself, if you are depressed and counting your days and months it is hard. If you live and keep occupied with something time passes. Years pass by, you learn something. Life goes on.*  
(Lidia, prisoner of more than 9 years, first timer)

Women were also keen to highlight that there are opportunities for personal development and some seemed to be exemplar participants in this compliance project (see Liebling assisted by Arnolds, 2004):

*My aim is to go out enriched and not exhausted and empty so that this time hasn't been wasted. To return to society cleverer not like the myth – depressed, ill. I'm willing to go out enriched in some ways.*  
(Mary, prisoner of 1 and half years, first timer)

While such complicit actions can be a sign of obedience and conformity to the institutional requirements, for many this can be used as one of the coping mechanisms, which helps to deal with the pains of imprisonment, or as suggested by Rowe (2011, p.585), a commitment to self-development and personal goals can serve as 'a means of taking control of their sentence and subverting its punitive purpose to refurnish it with a more positive set of meanings'. Women seemed generally keen to take part in different activities and it might even seem that prisoners have more opportunities inside to be engaged in courses and activities than on the other side of the wall.<sup>146</sup> On one occasion when a group of external education inspectors were brought inside prison I had an opportunity to observe their reaction to life in this confined space. The discussion between the inspectors focused on the regime and the fact that prisoners could be

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<sup>146</sup> They can be engaged with yoga, knitting, music studio, various art and music therapies, image psychology, the movie club - naming just a few options, which were available during my fieldwork.

engaged in many activities, which led them to question rhetorically where real freedom lies:

Inspector 1: *I would like to do many things too but I don't have time to sleep.*

[Due to the workload]

Inspector 2: *So on which side of the wall are you free?*

The inspectors did not seem to grasp the harshness of prison reality, as they were able to observe only the positive aspects of life inside but nevertheless this kind of interaction (even if distorted) provoked more critical reflections about their lives outside.

While many of the activities in IWP change on an annual basis (depending on available volunteers, project approvals and other resources) there were four core vocational training courses – hairdressing, cooking, sewing and house plastering and painting alongside primary and secondary education. This aligns with Moran, Pallot and Piacentini (2009, p.701) findings that ‘the ‘refeminisation’ of inmates is attempted via rehabilitation and education’. Some of the women talked appreciatively about the opportunity to access education and courses free of charge:

*There are possibilities to obtain education for free for which outside you would have to pay – hairdressing, plastering, sewing, you can learn computers... and it's not stated that this qualification is obtained in prison.*  
(Zaza, prisoner of two and half months, repeater)

Nevertheless similar to other jurisdictions long term prisoners pointed out the limited range of available courses (see Bullock & Bunce, 2018) and that they struggled to find new courses and activities to be engaged with:

*I have obtained all of the provided qualifications, I have nowhere to go. I watch TV and don't do much... It's better to be occupied with something. I've already been here for 9 years, I've been everywhere... I'm used to*

*everything, every day is the same.*' (Lidia, prisoner of more than 9 years, first timer)

The limited and gendered range of courses was also noted during a session on employability when the full list of courses among male and female prisons was read out. This caused serious concerns and discontent over the gender differences as male prisoners were offered a wider range of courses and activities than female prisoners:

Liene, prisoner: *Why are we not having those programmes?*

Ligita, employability staff: *You need to talk with your Resocialisation Department and request those courses*

Liene, prisoner: *How can we request them if we don't know that they exist?*

Evita, prisoner: [laughing] *That's right, women only need to know how to cook and other women's jobs* [so there is no need for other courses].

Thus, all of the activities can be viewed within a broader framework, which, similar to other jurisdictions, still adheres to the enforcement of traditional gender roles or the development of a specific skill set especially in relation to managing a household or beauty (see Bosworth, 1999; Bosworth & Carabine, 2001; Britton, 2011; Carlen, 1983; Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2009). In addition, a particular emphasis seems to be placed on enhancing their care for self and their outer appearance, which was seen as a sign of increased self-control and self-esteem:

*Initially they come and we teach how to take care of themselves... they grow and grow... initially it's obvious that they don't know how to do it... now she has glasses, she does her teeth, graduated from training, you can say she has increased self-control... and self-esteem.*

(Rubena, prison staff, authority)

This correlates with observations made by Goodkind (2009) within residential programs for girls in the USA, where empowerment of young women means raising



their self-esteem and self-control (see also McGregor, 2015). Scharff (2016, p.217) suggests that women (in particular young women) become ‘constructed as ideal neoliberal subjects’ (see also Cheng, 2016). The symbolic violence of the mainstream culture colonises their minds, distorts their bodies and silences them (Arruzza *et al.*, 2019).

It can be also noted that a women’s prison in Latvia is viewed as a place in which personal deficiencies can be collectively mitigated through the ‘gender appropriate’ socialisation process that embraces normative gender roles and identities. Thus, while in the West there have been calls for gender responsive services<sup>147</sup> (Bloom *et al.*, 2003), trauma-informed interventions (Baldwin, 2015) and a more ‘holistic women-centred approach’, which includes addressing women’s particular needs while minimising the use of imprisonment<sup>148</sup> (Corston, 2007, p.10); in Latvia these issues have been largely overlooked or addressed by imposing traditional gender norms and feminine ideals.

Women in IWP are also actively encouraged to display many of their acquired skills during annual celebrations such as school graduations, Christmas or other festivities. However, these ‘skill’ displays, have been more critically viewed by some Western penal researchers when researching Russian imprisonment (Moran, Pallot &

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<sup>147</sup> Although this approach has been criticised by Hannah-Moffat (2010, p.193) who suggests that it is still ‘situated within a narrow politics of difference’, which characterises women as relational and produces gendered governance. In addition, it emphasises individual responsibility while neglecting social structural contexts.

<sup>148</sup> In England and Wales, Baroness Jean Corston (2007) published a comprehensive report on women in the criminal justice system, which advocated a radical change in the way women are treated within the criminal justice system. Corston produced 43 recommendations or ‘a blueprint for a distinct, radically different, visibly led, strategic, proportionate, holistic, woman-centred, integrated approach’ (Corston, 2007, p.79). The key ideas entailed reducing the use of imprisonment, promoting community solutions and empowering women in conflict with law. However, with regret, Corston’s recommendations failed to live up to ‘the anticipated scope and impact’ (Annison & Brayford, 2015, p.2).

Piacentini, 2009; Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012). Beauty pageants<sup>149</sup> have been particularly criticised as they 'seek to rescript criminal women towards a predetermined 'ideal' of Russian womanhood' (Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2009, p.700). There were also some criticisms raised about annual collective events by a Latvian prison staff member. However, these concerns were not linked to gender issues but the prison subculture and Russian theme that gets displayed and celebrated during those kind of events:

*'If there are some cultural events in prison... I no longer go to see them... three, four times a year there are some cultural events. Again the same Russian theme of 'looking for talents' 'iscem talanti'... On the stage they are showing themselves the way they are. It is the same prison subculture but now put on the stage. They like to look at themselves a lot. They think they are cool.'*

(Dina, prison staff, services)

During my fieldwork I had the opportunity to attend a school graduation celebration in which women not only received graduation certificates but also displayed their talents and skills, which, in a way, produced a sense of inclusion and togetherness:

*The school graduation celebration started as usual with kind words about education and teachers then each programme separately received their graduation certificates. The event started with the fashion show. Women were displaying clothes that were designed by other prisoners. You could immediately see who was a 'popular' prisoner because the crowd was cheering and clapping loudly - mainly there were only popular ones. Then there was a street dance show, which livened up the whole hall. They also sang three songs – in duet, solo and at the end, all women involved came out to sing together the last song. There was also a gypsy dance, which was very warmly supported by everyone in the audience for me that was the moment when I felt that they are truly accepted and part of this*

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<sup>149</sup> The first beauty contest under the Soviet regime took place in Moscow in 1988, which was largely influenced by Western ideas and the notion of femininity, that 'came to mean not only being naturally nurturing, gentle, and understanding, but also being attractive, slim, and well-dressed' (Engel, 2004, p.255).

community.<sup>150</sup> *There were also some jokes, but the biggest applause was gained by the two theatre scenes, produced in the Russian language. To be honest they were brilliant actors and well deserved cheers.*  
(Field notes)

Ostensibly these kind of events represent a break for both prisoners and prison staff from mundane day-to-day activities and can be a source of enjoyment or, as suggested by Sarah, they represent a possibility to wake up the artist inside her and to forget that she is in prison. Moreover, it is not only about her individual ‘escape’ from imprisonment but also about generating escapes for those who come to view the performance:

*‘To celebrate the New Year, Christmas... we go on stage. We use the assembly hall [where] we go on stage and perform different theatrical activities and then there are... rehearsals... one dances, one sings, one plays, one leads that, decorates it all... yeah that... makes you forget [that you are in prison] because you are entertained... the artist in you is woken up... and we want to show... to do good to people... so that they also forget [that they are in prison]... so that they sit down and watch... and see something new and they laugh and they have fun.’*  
(Sarah, prisoner of 9 and half years, repeater)

Thus, the cultural significance of these collective gatherings should be acknowledged and it is important to highlight that, in fact, this is one of the Soviet legacies, which has maintained its form but not the content. During Soviet times the collective concerts and events in the assembly hall were used for promoting the Soviet ideology. As suggested by Vavokhine (2004) the Soviet government attempted to submit their citizens to the ideological doctrines on both sides of the wall. Thus, these

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<sup>150</sup> There is a substantial Roma community among women prisoners, which suggests that they are overrepresented within IWP. This is also the case in some other ex-Soviet countries, for example, Bulgaria (see Gounev, 2013). Overall, in many ‘industrialized countries, socially deprived minorities are over-represented within prisons’ (Christie, 2000, p.98; see also Wacquant, 1999; 2009). Nevertheless, both prisoners and prison staff in IWP recognised that Roma people assisted each other and shared everything they had, in that way embracing the group solidarity and resisting the ongoing process of individualisation.

kind of performances and collective gatherings had particular aims, and they were perceived as a norm:

*'In those times... with that understanding... when we were all building communism well it was like a norm of life in the end I was born in those times... and those concerts were a normal part [of life]... Even around the 90s... we still did some kind of concerts... we adapted Gogol by ourselves, some fairy tales... made costumes... but now... we have everything, but... Please go and put together a show, the administration will be happy, but our girls are a disgrace... Some kind of stupid jokes... people were more elaborated [during the Soviet times].'*

(Emily, prisoner of 1 year, repeater)

Emily also pointed out the deteriorating quality of the events and the overall degradation of the character of the 'prisoner contingent',<sup>151</sup> 'turemnij kontingent', as it is widely known in Latvia and other post-Soviet countries (see Pallot & Katz, 2017), has significantly changed. Moreover, currently there seems to be no underlying aims for those collective gatherings apart from continuing with the tradition and keeping women occupied and entertained. They have also become less frequent as the organisation of the events depends on prisoner engagement and willingness to be active:

*'All in all, everything depends on the women that are here. There can be great conditions but women... There are many things to do and events to take part in. Previously there were more events, we organized them, now nobody wants to do anything. You can't force them.'*

(Lidia, prisoner of more than 9 years, first timer)

The general assumption is that prisoners need to be engaged in various activities, which are all deemed to be a part of the resocialisation process. The various activities ideally would form 'a single rational plan purportedly designed to fulfil the official aims

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<sup>151</sup> If during the Soviet times it was a wide mix of people as the upper classes and the educated elites were prosecuted along with others, then currently the majority of women come from lower socio-economic strata with limited educational achievements and further career prospects (this will be further discussed in the next Chapter).

of the institution' (Goffman, 1961, p.17). However, it does not seem to be the case in IWP and this was highlighted as problematic by some members of staff. There seems to be a lack of understanding what resocialisation process entails and the overall organisational strategy was referred to as a 'Russian salad':<sup>152</sup>

*'To my mind currently in Latvia... the term resocialisation is not really clear, I don't know maybe in other prisons it's not like this but here I see that there is no understanding – oh let's make this, oh let's make that! but... that content does not correspond to the set concept... I see that the whole resocialization process isn't professional it is simply a Russian salad... I think there are ideas but they come out of thin air... and projects are being made... You can see that those projects are a string of words, which are simply pulled out and put together.'*  
(Dina, prison staff, services)

Some members of staff also criticised the mandatory engagement with the activities and saw it fundamentally flawed due to the fact that many prisoners do not take up courses and activities for the right reasons:

*I agree with resocialisation... but currently it is mandatory... If you want to progress through the system, receive early release or apply for open prison... It's not right because people are doing it for the wrong reasons... They don't do it to better themselves.*  
(Ira, prison staff)

This concern resonates with research findings from other jurisdictions where mandatory offender management programmes have been criticised for their lack of effectiveness and meaningful impact (see Bullock & Bunce, 2018; Schinkel, 2015). However, there are also other tendencies, which highlight how materialism is slowly eroding 'carceral collectivism' and the next section focuses on these developments.

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<sup>152</sup> Similar findings emerge from Russian female prisons in which the offered activities 'are not part of a recognisable programme of rehabilitation' (Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012, p.223) and from Lithuania, where the process of social rehabilitation is inconsistent and lacks 'an evident and coherent direction' (Vaičiūnienė and Vaidas, 2017, p.61).

## 7.4 Navigating Through the Prison Regime: ‘Creeping’ Materialism and the Neoliberal Agenda

Latvia like other post-Soviet countries has attempted to adjust to the demands of a market economy and imprisonment has not been left out of the broader adjustment framework. Prisoners have become increasingly exposed to neoliberal market techniques and the rising costs of imprisonment have impacted on prisoners and their families. Ever more deprivations become entangled with financial resources, which can potentially erode the sense of solidarity and mutual aid as it becomes an individual responsibility to deal with these new demands. Hence, as a consequence some prisoners have suggested that access to financial resources has become one of the most important elements for surviving in prison: *‘in principle if you have money, you have everything’* (Olivia) or *‘it’s hard when you don’t have any financial assistance as sad as it sounds that’s how it is’* (Sarah).

This view appears to highlight the day-to-day reality in which access to certain services and facilities depends on the availability of financial resources. Entitlements and certain rights, which previously were granted free of charge, for example, conjugal visits and phone calls, currently have become ‘marketised’. The possibility of conjugal visits no longer depends only on prisoners’ security level<sup>153</sup> and behaviour but also requires a financial contribution from either prisoners or their visitors. Similar developments have been observed by Pallot and Piacentini assisted by Moran (2012, p.170) in Russia, where the costs of conjugal visits are ‘equivalent to a cheap hotel –

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<sup>153</sup> According to the Sentence Execution Code of Latvia (1970), low security level female prisoners are entitled to 8 conjugal visits from 24 to 48 hours in length and 8 short visits from 1-2 hours in length per year whereas high security level prisoners are entitled to 5 conjugal visits from 12-24 hours in length and 4 short visits from 1-2 hours in length per year.

beyond the resources of many prisoners and their families' (see also Pallot & Katz, 2017). A similar view was shared by Emily who compared the conjugal visit facilities in Latvia to a hotel despite inconvenient facilities for which one is expected to pay:

*'All the time you are in the room, one kitchen, a TV room, there is a shower and toilet... There is a small discomfort... those are small premises... we are paying 16,50 euro per 24 h whereas previously it was free of charge... in the 90s you didn't have to pay... Now it's like a hotel you have to pay for everything.'*

(Emily, prisoner of 1 year, repeater)

Prisoners or visitors have to bring their own food and soft beverage supplies, which all must come from the shop as homemade goods cannot be brought in the prison. This only adds to the visiting costs. Food parcels have also become forbidden but some prisoners were reminiscent of times when they received food parcels, which could mitigate some of the financial constraints as many items were homemade and more affordable (see also Pallot & Katz, 2017):

*Previously... it was permitted to receive [food] parcels it is more convenient... there is a difference between a tiny jar [from the prison shop] or a big jar [of jam] from home... now also cigarettes are so expensive.*

(Felicity, prisoner of 1 year and 3 months, repeater)

In contrast, prison staff saw it as a much welcomed change because for them it was an additional burden to check all of the food parcels and they assumed that the women could acquire the desired items at the prison shop anyway.<sup>154</sup> This shift seemingly contributes towards the prison security while embracing a market economy.

'Marketisation' has also affected phone calls, which even further complicates the scarce opportunities for maintaining family ties, which can be vital for prisoners (see

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<sup>154</sup> Depending on their regime category, women are allowed to purchase goods in the prison shop – the minimum monthly salary in Latvia is the maximum that the women can spend; remand prisoners are exempted from this rule (Kamenska, Pūce & Laganovska, 2013).

Baldwin, 2015b; Carlen & Worrall, 2004; Pallot & Katz, 2017). While access to unrestricted phone calls was acknowledged as a positive change by many women, there are significant costs to incur and these costs are rising.<sup>155</sup> Some women have observed a substantial increase in phone charges, which makes communication with their loved ones more difficult:

*I think it's not fair that it gets more and more expensive [the calls] we looked with my husband and for 1.50 euros we used to talk for 10 minutes, but now 1.50 euros gives you only about 4 minutes; you can feel it a lot.*  
(Cindy, prisoner of almost 2 years, first timer)

*Phone calls are very expensive either if you call from here or receive a call. My sister, dad they have such bills. They are already considering writing letters. Here you have enough time for writing letters outside, it's different.*  
(Isobel, prisoner of 1 year and 1.5 months, first timer)

However, some women seemed to find cracks within the system making free calls for the duration of five seconds and despite the inconvenience of the shortness of these calls, this opportunity seemed to be appreciated by those who could not afford call costs:

*It's good... those girls who have no support can call for five seconds free of charge. I was calling to everyone myself for five seconds and said everything quickly. It's not difficult if you want it.*  
(Beth, prisoner of 5 months, first timer)

Women can also incur costs for electric equipment - personal TV, fridge, radio, kettle just to name a few of the items. This was introduced in 2013 by the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No.739 (entered into force in 2014) that listed all of the services and items, which were deemed as additional luxuries for which prisoners were expected to pay. However, during the fieldwork I observed that prisoners either did not have the

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<sup>155</sup> A poster on the prison wall in 2016 indicated these costs: local landline 0.114 euros per minute; mobile 0.142; international calls (mobiles) 0.342 per minute, connection charge 0.043 euro cents.



equipment or it was registered as the prison's property and nobody was required to pay for it. These costs seemed to be rarely charged (most frequently women had to pay for the additional TV channels) and prison staff had a more flexible approach towards enforcement of these rules.

Thus, if previously prisoners seemed to mitigate the Soviet inhumane regime and severe deprivations by assisting one another (see Ginzburg, 1967; Celmina, 1986), then currently prisoners seem to rely on finding cracks within the system, and prison staff are likely to bend some rules. Prison staff are also more likely to be involved in meeting the basic requirements for those in need, though in return obedience and cooperation were expected:

*This lady... she didn't have any support... she didn't have anything and she was so deep down that she got fed up with life... they called the head of the department... [and she] said don't worry we'll get everything for you a shampoo, washing powder, towel... even a hair colour.*

(Zaza, prisoner of two and half months, repeater)

*Clothes are given... hygiene... very good second hand clothes... prison staff are looking if you don't have something they give you everything.*<sup>156</sup>

(Nina, prisoner of two years and 2 months, repeater)

*They [prison staff] are warm, fair and understanding when they see that indeed [you are in need] and you kindly ask, but of course, you also need to behave and help them when needed.*

(Teresa, prisoner of 5 years and 4 months, first timer)

In addition, prison staff tried to employ in prison those women who did not receive any assistance from home in order to generate some kind of income as well as to gain information about life inside, which could be referred to as a 'relationships-for-

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<sup>156</sup> This view was contested by those women who had done some 'time' abroad. Scandinavian countries were particularly praised for providing the best conditions and services.

intelligence' (Liebling, 2011a). It was not seen as a fair practice by other prisoners who might receive some help from home, who for this reason might appear to be less in need of an additional income:

*If you receive some assistance from home they don't employ you... There are people who jump the queue [for work]... they take those who will tell them everything, there are people who are not queuing at all... she gets ahead... those who are not helped are taken... Somehow, they are doing it wrongly.*

(Felicity, prisoner of 1 year and 3 months, repeater)

There seemed to be a 'screening' or 'vetting' process in operation in order to be employed by the prison. This differs from an 'entrepreneurial' approach because while entrepreneurs are interested in employing those who work most efficiently and produce profit (as discussed in Chapter 6), prison staff judge the person's character and suitability for the position in addition to their abilities. Each position requires a certain 'type' of person and prison staff profile women accordingly:

*'We talk with a person... not everyone can work here and clean our premises... not everyone can be offered to work at the medical section... initially we look at the person... while working with a person we see what she is good at and what not.'*

(Zinta, prison staff, authority)

This was also acknowledged by prisoners who seemed aware of trust and institutional expectations that may have a decisive influence on whether they are employed by the prison or not:

*I have [access to] a lot of information you cannot put just anyone [to work there]. I'm a reliable person that you can trust. I know whom, when and what I can tell... also those who clean... they hear a lot while doing their job so [the concern is] that the information doesn't spread.*

(Isobel, prisoner of 1 year and 1.5 months, first timer)

Apart from official employment there are also other informal ‘work’ opportunities. The internal currency for prisoners can be cigarettes or other consumable goods usually tea/coffee bought from the prison shop for non-smokers (see Omelchenko, 2016; Symkovych, 2018). Those women who can afford to pay can arrange with other prisoners to provide for them with certain services such as laundry or covering the daily rota cleaning duties. As suggested by some women this creates master-servant relationships in which the servant’s position can be demeaning and effectively constitutes ‘a cast at the bottom of detachment society’ (Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012, p.210):

*What is currency in prison – those are cigarettes... [or] products for non-smokers. If you have money then you can use these ‘little’ people. I will give you three cigarettes and you wash the laundry instead of me. You become as a servant to somebody.*

(Beth, prisoner of 5 months, first timer)

*Well it’s the same as outside nobody is doing anything for a thank you. Money is cigarettes... Then you look how much laundry and then you count how many cigarettes [it will cost]. The same as outside only relatives and closest friends will do something for free.*

(Zaza, prisoner of two and half months, repeater)

In addition to informally ‘paying’ each other for some services prisoners also engage in ‘shopping’ around each other’s wardrobes. Despite limited access to cigarettes and the existence of prohibitions - if caught exchanging or selling clothes women can receive punishment, at times it all might seem worth it:

*‘Cigarettes are our money... for cigarettes you can buy things... therefore there are limitation on buying cigarettes. For a week we can buy only 10 packs of cigarettes... if you want a beautiful costume... you don’t pay its full price, for example 50 [euros], you’ll get it for couple of packs of cigarettes.*

(Emily, prisoner of 1 year, repeater)

Some prison staff were also against the strict count of belongings and saw it as one of the Soviet legacies, which ultimately resulted in unnecessary punishments and paper work:

*We have many things that remained from that system, why? One example... clothes, a strict count of woman's belongings 2 trousers, 4 skirts... they are swapping with clothes, the... department notes down where who and what has been exchanged creating unnecessary papers and punishments. Such little details, which can be sorted out but, no, not here, because it is prescribed by law... and we have to follow.*  
(Zaiga, prison staff)

Apparently there are some understanding educators who officially re-register items to new owners thus legitimising some of the illegally acquired items As suggested by Sparks, Bottoms and Hay (1996), a good prison staff will know when to bend the rules:

*You cannot swap with clothes you can get a report... [but] there are educators who will register... you tell that it's too small for you that you want to give it to somebody else, so that she registers in the file.*  
(Felicity, prisoner of 1 year and 3 months, repeater)

Despite some leniency and prison staff at times bending the overall official rules, women are taught not to rely on the state's support as most of the time it seemed easier to acquire necessary items at their own expense as Cindy argues: *you cannot rely on the fact that when you need something you can get it.* At times, it can be a member of staff that covers the costs for medication or food, in particular, for children who are located with their mothers in prison because items cannot be instantly accessed and they need to be pre-ordered but this is not always possible:

*If kids get ill... either you buy the medicine from your own wages or nothing is happening... On many occasions, I have paid for everything myself... I need to know one day in advance what kind of food/ medication is necessary for the baby... so that I can process and order those things through nurses... Women can't just walk out to the pharmacy and get the necessary*

*remedies... and all of the remedies are costly... a container of baby food costs 15 euros... There are 9 kids in my department I can't pay for all of them I would have to spend also all my husband's salary.*  
(Eva, prison staff)

I came to realise that at times prison staff attempt to mitigate the shortcomings of the system and many of them seem to adhere to the principles of social justice and other values that were promoted during Soviet times, and this seems to be an essential aspect for understanding post-Soviet imprisonment and the relationships among people. Therefore, the next Chapter tries to delve deeper into the values that guide people and their interpretation of the 'new system' and how it influences the way prison operates today.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this Chapter highlights the significant changes in prison regimes in action that have been introduced since the breakdown of Soviet rule. In the context of Latvia, distinctive techniques of punishment and surveillance have been inherited from the Soviet era but these approaches have gradually been eroded opening opportunities for new rules and techniques towards punishment to emerge. This Chapter has depicted this gradual regime change and highlighted the intertwined struggles between attachment to 'carceral collectivism' and the increasing pressure for individualisation. Currently the pressure seems to be placing individual self-interest over collective interest but there are still many subtle forms of collectivity and togetherness.

Notably 'carceral collectivism' embodies a particular sense of punishment, which is rooted in shared experience of the pains of imprisonment but it also creates

togetherness as a response. This has been gradually displaced by more diversified experiences of imprisonment in which progression is linked with additional entitlements that require not only exemplary behaviour but also access to financial resources. It can be argued that increasing levels of deprivation become entangled with access to financial resources, which contributes towards the erosion of solidarity and mutual aid in prison.

The Soviet approach towards imprisonment has been gradually displaced but there are still some lasting influences. Even if the market rationale has been introduced there seems to be a considerable reluctance towards its application by prison staff and cracks within the system can be found by prisoners. However, women's imprisonment in Latvia is failing to address vulnerabilities and needs of women, therefore community alternatives should be utilised to a greater extent than hitherto to reduce harms caused by imprisonment.

## **Chapter 8 The Collapse of Values and the Prison Society in Transition**

### **Introduction**

The collapse of the Soviet project and its ideological defeat required a remake of society. Significant transformations were needed at all three levels – macro, meso and micro and this Chapter focuses on transformations at the micro level, or how people and the relationships between them changed within the prison environment (and beyond) in response to shifts in a wider ideological framework. It seems that any substantial shift in ideology requires the creation of a ‘new’ human being who embodies the new ideology and enacts it in day-to-day life. Thus on a micro level the collapse of the Soviet project implied the destruction of the ‘Homo sovieticus’ (Alexievich, 2016; Zinoviev, 1986), including the associated patterns of behaviour and the underpinning value sets. This Chapter in particular focuses on the collapse of the Soviet ideology and how it affected prison social structures and codes of conduct among women prisoners.

The first section of this Chapter focuses on transformations within women’s prison social structures, and informal rules. Despite informal ‘laws’ and prisoner hierarchies being commonly associated with male prisons, women prisoners also have prisoner informal organisations and ostensibly more hidden hierarchies, which should be explored, as this provides a valuable insight into how power is negotiated and shaped inside carceral space (see Bosworth, 1999; Rowe, 2011). This section highlights the erosion of the Soviet informal rules and hierarchies.

The second section of the Chapter shows that certain Soviet applied rules and techniques remained in place within IWP and continued to impact prisoner relationships

and life in confinement. Thus, as found by other prison researchers (Oleinik, 2003; Pallot, 2015; Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012; Piacentini, 2004a; Piacentini & Slade, 2015; Slade & Vaičiūnienė, 2018; Symkovych, 2017; Vaičiūnienė & Tereškinas, 2017; Vavokhine, 2004), the Soviet legacy still considerably affects the day-to-day life and relationships in the post-Soviet carceral space. This section in particular focuses on the system of internal informers, which has not only adapted to the new context but also become an integral part of it despite continuously producing social atomisation, animosity and mistrust among people (see Los, 2002).

The third section draws on the more ‘mundane’ dynamics of staff-prisoner relationships and how they have changed due to the shift from the authoritarian prison regime to the progressive stage system that operates on the premise of the ‘soft power’ (see Crewe, 2011b). While navigating through complex human relationships between prisoners and prison staff might be difficult, and capturing all aspects of those complex relationships can be rendered impossible, the aim of this section is to highlight the most striking examples of what shapes or informs those relationships and how they are linked with the Soviet past and the current neoliberal regime. By and large, it can be argued that staff-prisoner relationships are based on a mix of ‘hard’ power, which is a lasting Soviet legacy, and ‘soft’ power, that is a component of the new neoliberal order and the progressive stage system of prison management. However, paradoxically there are elements of the Soviet legacy also within the ‘soft’ power, and reasons for this will become clear in the next section.

The last section of this Chapter delves deeper into how people perceive and experience the transition from the Soviet to the neoliberal society inside prison boundaries and beyond them with a particular focus on the impact on value systems.



This section raises important questions and reveals some of the reasons for the so-called Soviet romanticism or nostalgia and why it might be even more predominant within the confined space of the prison than elsewhere. The Soviet ideology and some of the values seem to be kept alive within IWP; and some women expressed the view that ‘inside’ they still ‘live as in the Soviet times’. Nevertheless, this should not be understood in the context of the Soviet brutalising prison regime, rather it should be attributed to the overall institutional culture and the values it embraces.

## **8.1 Informal Rules and Social Structures in IWP**

Life in prison revolves around the official norms and regulations and prisoner created ‘laws’ or informal regulations (Oleinik, 2003), and this section investigates the latter, which similarly to the official norms were bound to change after the collapse of the Soviet project. The commitment to informal rules or the ‘understanding’ has faded, due to the collapse of the Soviet context and the value system from which this ‘understanding’ emerged. The Soviet strategy for sentencing fostered prisoner migration and this ensured the spread of the prison subculture across the vast Soviet project (Vaičiūnienė & Tereškinas, 2017).

Informal ‘laws’ and prisoner hierarchies are commonly associated with male carceral institutions instead of female (see Crewe, 2009; Dirga *et al.*, 2015; Kaminski, 2004; Oleinik, 2003; Symkovych, 2017; Vaičiūnienė & Tereškinas, 2017; Varese, 1998; Vavokhine, 2004; Ward & Kassebaum, 1965), however women’s imprisonment is also characterised by hierarchical structures particularly in the post-Soviet space where the Soviet legacy continuously reproduces hierarchies.

The current prisoner hierarchies and social structures within IWP stem from the Soviet regime and prison organisation (as discussed in Chapter 4). The Soviet approach of organising prisoners as self-managed collectives (see Pallot, 2015; Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012; Vavokhine, 2004) is still practiced in IWP. Thus, it can be argued that prison hierarchies are reinforced through the way life in prison is organised. On many occasions during my fieldwork I observed that prison staff required women to organise their ‘brigade’ to execute some tasks, which implies that prison staff delegate power to certain prisoners who, then, can exert this power over other prisoners:

*One of the prisoners was asked to organise a group of people ‘brigade’ to go to clean the place before the renovation starts and the prisoner just calmly reaffirmed that there is nothing to worry about she would organise everything.*

(Field notes)

The hierarchical structures that were embedded within Soviet imprisonment are, to some extent, replicated within the ‘new’ system. This applies not only to organisation of work via prisoner ‘brigades’ but also to the hierarchical structures within the dormitory type cells in which prisoners can exert their power (as discussed in Chapter 6). This seems to be a logical continuity of the Soviet system. As shared by Emily, during Soviet times each prison cell had its own hierarchy and who ever slept closer to the window was the most powerful in the cell, whereas the top layer of the bunk beds was considered as the worst. Thus, women seemed to use spatial placement for indicating their status and influence (this has been also found among male prisoners see

Kaminski (2004)). The Soviet prison administration did not allocate the bed place<sup>157</sup> as it was left to prisoner arrangements:

*'You arrive in the cell and there is already their own hierarchy and you are told you can sleep there (researcher: then it wasn't the administration who told you where to sleep?) Correct, it wasn't the administration.'*  
(Emily, prisoner of 1 year, repeater)

The continuous link with the Soviet past is also preserved by the use of a specific argot associated with Soviet times and some prison staff suggested that it contributes to the maintenance of the post-Soviet culture space:

*'It is elementary to prove that there still exists a post-Soviet culture space because of that slang, argot, which fits within prison subculture. It is saturated with the same words, moreover, Russian words, which are used by gypsies, Lithuanians or Latvians while communicating between themselves, the same ones as during the Soviet times.'*  
(Dina, prison staff, services)

Similarly while doing my fieldwork I came across such words as 'zek(a)' – a prisoner, 'sklonka' – bed, 'kozjol' – billy goat, 'muzhiki' – real men, 'petux' – rooster, 'blatnije' – gangsters, 'opuschenije' – lowered down, 'obshchak' – the communal fund, and many others, which are essentially subcultural references that can be understood only by those who share this subculture's specific knowledge. Some women seemed to be aware not only of the labels attached to various hierarchies ('kozjol', 'muzhiki', 'blatnije', 'petux', 'opuschenije') (see Vaičiūnienė & Tereškinas, 2017; Vavokhine, 2004), but also of the code of conduct or the 'understanding' ('poniatiem'), which regulates their behaviour and relationships. However, this knowledge, mainly for the so-called career criminals, was obtained prior to entering

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<sup>157</sup> Severe overcrowding at times meant that two women had to share a bed (see Aizupe, 1974; Celmina, 1986; Ginzburg, 1967). Prisoners were also not allowed to use their beds at any point during the day (Aizupe, 1974). This practice continued after Latvia regained its independence in the 90s.

prison and should be attributed to the specific circumstances and the previous exposure to the criminal world and its informal rules. As suggested by Pallot and Katz (2017) women can internalise the code by which their partners/ family members live, as shared by Olivia:

*'I grew up within a criminal environment... there are many things that I wouldn't do... those kind of rules... there are many people who respect me for my behaviour... for the integrity, morals... internal strength. I'm a very strong [person] by nature... I always try to be on the side of the truth... It's not important who is she or what, I'll be on the side of the truth... It's not important... I can go against everyone but I'll be on the side of the truth and I don't give a shit.'*

(Olivia, prisoner of two and ½ years, repeater)

This aligns with the importation model and the notion that prisoner subculture is largely affected by experiences prior to imprisonment (Irwin, 1970; Irwin & Cressey, 1962). Informal organisations and hierarchies can be linked to the attained status outside prison boundaries. Similarly as suggested by another woman the status of criminal authority should be earned outside and not in prison:

*You have to earn your name outside [prison] not here... here there is no authority, really there isn't (researcher: what does it mean to earn your name outside?) to earn your name outside, how to tell you, not to allow someone to do something bad... so that if you have a debt you could go and return it... so that there is fairness you give back what you took... People come together and one will stand up and say that person needs to return this much of money and that's all... I do so... [to my surprise she acknowledged her status as a criminal authority] (researcher: then is it similar to the court?) Yes, among yourselves... you can decide on everything... so that you don't have problems.*

(Nina, prisoner of two years and 2 months, repeater)

Nina's explanation of criminal authority<sup>158</sup> is equivalent to that provided by Oleinik (2003) in his study of Russian male penal subcultures in which it was suggested

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<sup>158</sup> She was the only woman who claimed the status of 'criminal authority' and during the fieldwork this was also indirectly implied by prison staff. However, the status of 'criminal authority' should not be

that acquiring criminal authority entitles one to speak. Thus, it can be argued that the career criminals share the code of conduct, and women have to apply the same principles and 'laws' if they are to achieve a desired status and criminal authority. It also seems that much of the success within the criminal world depends on the character, integrity and the ability to earn respect through making the right decisions and finding the truth.

It also became noticeable while in the field that those who possessed this knowledge of informal rules were respected by other prisoners and to some extent also supported by prison staff.<sup>159</sup> This has been noticed by both prisoners and other staff members:

(researcher: but when we speak about the hierarchy who is at the top?) *Of course, those who have done their time for the longest feel at the top. Sometimes there is some kind of support from the administration – you have been doing your time for a long time you can do so and so, that maybe strengthen their self-esteem. For me, I'm here for the first time and I don't experience this.*

(Isobel, prisoner of 1 year and 1.5 months, first timer)

*Those who work here for a long time, they have somehow more personal relationships with those who do their time repeatedly.*

(Marika, prison staff)

Some of the more experienced staff members reconfirmed that it is easier to work with reoffenders as they are honest, and while not always conforming to institutional rules and incentives, they were women who maintained their personal integrity, as

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confused with a more general position of authority in the prison; the former implies a power that can be exerted both inside the prison and beyond its boundaries, whereas the latter refers to the position of power, which is limited to the prison.

<sup>159</sup> This could be viewed as one of the Soviet legacies as during the Soviet times career criminals were empowered by prison staff and rose to the highest positions among prisoners (see Celmina, 1986; Vavokhine, 2004).

shared by Zinta: *'you know they don't need those 'ticked boxes'... they are all the time fair to you. They talk as they think... to some extent, it's easier to work with them'.*

However, there were also women prisoners who seemed eager to attain 'authority' and status while doing their time in IWP, thus adhering to the deprivation model,<sup>160</sup> which implies that imprisonment is a catalyst of the subculture that develops in the prison (see Goffman, 1961; Sykes, 1958):

*'You develop your status, authority... well among prisoners... The second time when I got here... about 3 years after [the first time]... when I arrived I was recognised... by those who remained... I was accepted by my first term... that is there was already formed opinion about me, they already knew what I'm capable of how do I live... about a month or two they were looking if I haven't changed.'*

(Sarah, prisoner of 9 and half years, repeater)

Thus, similar to Oleinik's (2003, p.60) observations prisoners seem to be bound to 'the lasting character of reputation'. This notion implies that prisoners achieve a certain reputation while doing their time and if they re-enter prison they can be accepted with their prior status due to the detailed and personalised knowledge that has been preserved within prison community.

The capacity to obtain personalised knowledge and to 'read' people was mentioned by many prisoners. As suggested by Flame: *this is a real school of life. When you talk for 5 minutes [with somebody] it is clear straight away who is who*, and it was seen as an additional 'life skill', which can be developed while in prison:

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<sup>160</sup> The two contesting models have developed within the sociology of imprisonment, namely, deprivation and importation models. The deprivation model suggests that social life in prison and informal norms develop in response to deprivations and the total character of the prison (Goffman, 1961; Sykes, 1958); on the contrary, the importation model suggests that the imported characteristics from outside matters more in the social organisation and relations than the deprivations experienced in the prison (Irwin, 1970; Irwin & Cressey, 1962). However, these models can also be combined (see Crewe, 2006) and this study also adheres to this position.

*'There are many who are not doing their time for the first time and... here in a closed space we are all becoming psychologists... in the cell a newbie comes in... and you already see through that person... how she came in, what she said how she sat down, how she placed her cigarettes did she offer or not... you see it straight away... you are in four walls you are four or six people there, you cannot fail to see it all... perhaps for those first timers it's not so obvious but for me it's obvious as she came in I can tell about her everything, everything! Even what kind of job she'll get here.'*  
(Olivia, prisoner of two and ½ years, repeater)

*Here you get to know people... Prison can teach you a lot... For me it is a life experience. Here you learn how to read people... to know who is who 'v ludej razberatsa'... I have gained my life experience here.*  
(Lidia, prisoner of more than 9 years, first timer)

Similar findings have been reported by Bosworth (1999) who found women frequently highlighted how the experience of imprisonment had strengthened them.

Even if women prisoners do not follow the same system of hierarchies as men, which in Latvia is widely known as the 'caste system',<sup>161</sup> more subtle informal hierarchies exist in women's prison similarly to other jurisdictions (see Bosworth & Carabine, 2001). As acknowledged by IWP staff: *it's not an official system, but it's there... everyone should be equal but it's not so* (Ira) or as suggested by another staff member:

*Well they have something, I think, it's not as visible as for men. Mainly we have some kind of equality, it's not like there are two and all the rest bellow them. There are of course some who are more respected but nothing so striking (researcher: and who are more respected?) Well perhaps those who have been sitting here for long and not for the first time.*  
(Livija, prison staff)

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<sup>161</sup> Male prisoner social systems have been stratified or populated by different groups of inmates, for example: 'blatnyje' – gangsters, 'muzhiki' – real men, 'petux' – cock, 'kozjol' – billy goat, 'opuschenije' – lowered down. Each group status determines both their intra- and inter- group relationships and regulates their relationships with the prison administration (see Vavokhine, 2004; Oleinik, 2003; Vaičiūnienė & Tereškinas, 2017).

Prisoners also alluded to this view that: *there are some like 'nobodies'... but there are also the queens* (Flame). As told by another prisoner those who are at the top try not to interact with those from the lower 'class' in order to avoid 'contamination' and losing their status among prisoners which, as noted by Rowe (2011, p.578), is a 'fear of contamination through association with groups to whom prisoners attached a stigma themselves'. This also reflects the code of conduct of male prisoners and their understanding of an 'appropriate' association (see Vavokhine, 2004; Oleinik, 2003; Vaičiūnienė & Tereškinas, 2017):

*Those from the highest class do not talk with those from the lowest in a way not to get contaminated as they can lose their status if they do [communicate]... it's like in school you have your clique and that's all you don't talk with others... Some are talking with everyone but those are few.*  
(Isobel, prisoner of 1 year and 1.5 months, first timer)

Although for some prisoners the display of power inside was unnecessary as the influence and who you were outside mattered the most, as shared by Nina: *those who feel the coolest [inside IWP] perhaps outside are nobody.*

Prisoner status also seems to be closely linked with the work undertaken in prison. Heney (2010, p.75) reports similar findings from a Hungarian women's prison, where 'the entire prison is structured around work, and inmate hierarchies emerge from it'. A cleaner in the 'zone' was the lowest position for which the administration struggled to recruit people. It was deemed as something dishonourable and any self-respecting person would be expected to refuse this job offer:

*I don't judge people who clean the toilet... I will never judge them because it's a job... and she is doing it also for us... but of course, I will not go to do that... but I won't let [anyone] offend that person, there is a difference... For me it's not about a good or bad work it's just there is some work, which I will allow myself to go to and others not... Of course, I did go to work*



*here, which outside I wouldn't do, but here I don't have a choice I need to live... I cleaned those vegetables and sat in that dirt.'*  
(Olivia, prisoner of two and ½ years, repeater)

Prison staff in fact acknowledged that working in the kitchen was one of the most prestigious positions. By obtaining a position in the kitchen a prisoner potentially secures not only remuneration but also respect and a higher informal status among other prisoners: *closer to the kitchen, [closer to] authority, it's the position of respect... they want to work [in the kitchen]* (Rita).<sup>162</sup> This desired position could cause competition among prisoners and different tactics seemed to be applied to discredit those who work in the kitchen:

*One thinks the soup was sour... and shouts... and then of course the chef tells what she thinks and then of course you need to watch... so that they don't get into a fight... Sometimes they do it on purpose so that the person would get fired and they would be able to get into their place, there are those tricks (researcher: are there many tricks?) There are a lot of those tricks when you work here [as a member of staff] you need to see if one accuses another person... you need to watch if they are not trying to get their people in... perhaps the person is innocent... there are a lot of those tricks.*  
(Rubena, prison staff, authority)

The current environment, in which the available financial resources can be a good indicator of the overall wellbeing in prison, result in considerable competition for more lucrative positions that might involve bending some of the informal rules such as prohibition to inform on fellow prisoners, but this rule seems to be amongst the most flouted due to the new context and the means of prison management (this will be further discussed in the next section).

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<sup>162</sup> This could stem from the informal code of conduct, which prohibits eating something that is touched by the person from a lower caste.

However, not all women are able to attain respect and authority in prison. Sex offenders and those who are imprisoned for crimes related to children are universally at the bottom of prison hierarchies (see Crewe, 2005a; Crewe, 2009; Ievins & Crewe, 2015; Pallot & Katz, 2017; Rowe, 2011). All women who either committed infanticide or sexual crimes against children by default occupied the lowest position within prison hierarchies (Baldwin, 2015). Exclusion from the prison community was almost a certainty or as a prison staff remarked: *those who kill children or female rapists will never be at the highest level* (Ira). Such prisoners could be excluded from mixing with other prisoners for their own protection - they can be placed in solitary confinement or share a cell with people who have committed similar offences as other prisoners tend to avoid any contact with them: *nobody touch child murderers, paedophiles... but nobody wants to talk to them... it's better for them to stay in their group not to trigger anyone* (to abuse them) (Dolly). Similarly as shared by Isobel: *here nobody talks to those who have committed a crime related to children; regardless of their personalities, they are having a stamp on their face.*

This kind of animosity and prejudice towards people who commit crimes against children is equally prevalent across different jurisdictions and across both female and male estates (see Crewe, 2009; Ievins & Crewe, 2015; Rowe, 2011; Symkovych, 2017). IWP staff shared the view that these prisoners form the most vulnerable group within prison and require additional protection. Although some staff members also expressed their reservations and personal difficulties to accept women who have committed crimes against children, especially child-murder, which Baldwin (2015, p.39) conceptualises as 'an emotional response to mothers' crimes':

(researcher: are there any prejudices among members of staff to those who have committed a crime against children?) *I have. I don't have any rights to show it. In any circumstances, I need to be polite. That is my [personal] attitude that I don't want to talk that is a horrible crime. It's not understandable how you can kill a child because of a jar of jam.*  
(Ira, prison staff)

While such strong views and feelings were shared by prisoners, the progressive stage system through its 'soft power' and increasing 'tightness' (see Crewe, 2009; Crewe, 2011b; Crewe, 2015) pacifies the prison environment and reduces the likelihood of physical violence (as discussed in the previous Chapter). Moreover, the greater focus on self-regulation also seems to erode some features of the 'carceral collectivism'. Those who have repeatedly experienced imprisonment recognised the erosion of the prison community and 'collectiveness' - prisoners allegedly keep more separate despite communal living arrangements:

*Before it was friendlier, yes, weekend flew by - now they drag, generations are changing* (researcher: are you now more on your own?) *Yes, everyone is doing something by themselves, one reads, one watches TV, one writes.*  
(Flame, prisoner of 1 year and 5 months, repeater)

*During those times it was a bit different* (researcher: what exactly?) *relationships, the conditions were different... Now... conditions are improving... people are changing... before conditions were bad but people were closer, they were helping [each other], they kept together... those young ones [now] are each by themselves.*  
(Dolly, prisoner of 1 year and 3 months, repeater)

*'People have changed a lot now, there is no work now, the shop is expensive everyone is eating away each other because everyone wants to eat and smoke in those days it was very friendly now everyone is by themselves.. everything was different.'*  
(Emily, prisoner of 1 year, repeater)

Thus, many aspects of life inside are gradually changing - prisoner informal rules and regulations are becoming weaker. This aspect has been noted by various prison

researchers within the post-Soviet space who would argue that in recent years the role and importance of the code of conduct or living according to the criminal ‘understanding’ has lost its importance (Oleinik, 2003; Vaičiūnienė & Tereškinas, 2017). The same has been observed by some of the prisoners in IWP who suggest that this ‘understanding’ has ended. Financial capital can ensure power within the prison community and more often power is being consolidated instead of distributed, thus if once prisoners were assisting each other and mitigating deprivations (see Celmina, 1986; Ginzburg, 1967; Aizupe, 1974) then now it is rarely the case:

*Those who have money get power here, you are friends because of money, because of the shop... It used to be different... those who didn't have were helped because that person didn't have [something] now it's different... Now very rarely you're helped... for me it's disgusting.. if you have money you get power, it's not right – it's disgusting... that law has ended... the code the criminal honour [has ended] we don't have it anymore.*  
(Dolly, prisoner of 1 year and 3 months, repeater)

Similarly as observed by Olivia criminals have lost their moral ground by becoming corruptible and the same criticisms were directed against those who represent the law enforcement agencies, in particular the police and it was deemed that both sides the criminal and the law enforcers have lost their ‘cause’:

*'Regarding criminals there are no more criminals as before... now mainly they are drug addicts or alcoholics... there are no personal moral values.. It's not like it used to be... It's not the same criminal world... everyone is purchasable... yes, previously one side somehow fought for a cause and the other side fought for their understanding now there isn't any side, now they are all purchasable... it's disgusting indeed... previously... there was some kind of respect [towards the criminal authority] because he is fighting for the truth well you might get your head smashed for few times... but you knew he is looking for the truth... now you get for nothing.'*  
(Olivia, prisoner of two and ½ years, repeater)

Therefore, the transition to a market economy and the neoliberal regime seemingly changed both formal and informal rules and regulations on both sides of the wall and the future of the informal rules within criminal subculture might require reconfiguration (see Katz & Pallot, 2018; Slade & Vaičiūnienė, 2018; Vaičiūnienė & Tereškinas, 2017). Due to the particular Soviet context and the origins of the code of conduct, the destruction of the Soviet project inevitably had a bearing on those regulations as they lost their meaning as the result of changing ideologies.

However, while the illicit laws and the value system might be in disarray, some of the Soviet surveillance techniques managed to survive with few amendments through the transition process and continuously affect life within confinement. One of the examples is the system of internal informers, which effectively adapted to the new context within IWP and became a vital part of controlling the social world from within and the next section attempts to provide an insight into how this practice affects life inside the prison.

## **8.2 The ‘Snitch Zone’**

Latvia, similar to other post-Soviet states, emerged from a totalitarian regime, which for decades enforced collectivisation as well as social atomisation through total surveillance and a system of informers (see Los, 2002). While society at large could break away from this omnipresent state’s surveillance, penal institutions were slower to change. It was mainly for practical reasons that this technique survived and thrived in the context of confinement in independent Latvia. The persistent gathering of internal intelligence seemed to be highly valuable due to the lack of technological solutions for

maintaining safety and security, and shared dormitory living arrangements made this as a viable strategy.<sup>163</sup> As suggested by one of the prisoners - prison staff would not know what is happening inside if they failed to persuade women to cooperate and provide information:

*Here they have their own people that follow what is happening. If such a person hears something then you know 100% that the news will arrive to where they are not supposed to arrive... in general if they didn't have such people they [staff] wouldn't have any information. In general they don't see what is happening inside they [staff] cannot live without them [informers]. They wouldn't know anything.'*

(Isobel, prisoner of 1 year and 1.5 months, first timer)

As argued by Piacentini and Slade (2015, p.190) mutual peer surveillance or 'the polyopticon of all watching all' is one of the three main characteristics of 'carceral collectivism' and as in the Soviet past this practice continues to produce social atomisation (see Los, 2002) within IWP and other post-Soviet prisons (see Pabjan, 2009; Tolokonnikova & Žižek, 2014). The persistence of this technique causes anxieties and mistrust among women who described feeling as if there were eyes and ears everywhere:

*Don't be afraid of prison be afraid of inhabitants (researcher: is it so bad?) Yes, it is so you need to be afraid of inhabitants... This is a place where there are eyes and ears [everywhere] they'll even know that you are in the toilet and what are you doing there but it is so I'm sorry for saying it rudely... Especially in the zone there are girls that go and complain they have some 'treats', it is beneficial for them (researcher: do you know who they are?) Girls know who are with horns and who are without. Girls know, which word to say and of which to think a hundred times before saying. There are girls that sit [and listen] and you'll have very good information... there is somebody in each of the cells that will rat, well they try.*

(Bella, prisoner of 2 years and 4 months, first timer)

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<sup>163</sup> In fact, the department, which gathers internal intelligence in IWP was the only department I had no access to during my fieldwork and as told by other members of staff allegedly it is the most secretive department, which does not like to share information even internally so my presence was not welcomed at any point. While I failed to gain access to this department women shared abundant information about how they experienced this practice of gathering internal intelligence.

This also suggests that those who are responsible for prisoner allocation might use their power and discretion to insert some of ‘their own people’ within cells to keep control over what is happening inside; and it seems no coincidence that the department which gathers internal intelligence is also responsible for the prisoner cell allocations.

Moreover, due to weaker ‘collectiveness’ and cohesion among prisoners (as discussed in the previous section), women might be more likely to cooperate with the prison staff prioritising their individual gains over collective interests. Research from other jurisdictions suggests that women can be more cooperative with the prison authorities than men due to their ‘relative lack of economic bargaining power’ (Liebling, 2009, p.20). This can strengthen the grip of the administration over prisoners while causing greater mistrust and poorer interpersonal relationships among prisoners:

*Yes, between inmates perhaps our administration has created a way how we [can] eat each other [alive], so that you don't count [on each other]... If something [happens] then to the ‘white house’ ‘belij dom’.*<sup>164</sup>  
(Flame, prisoner of 1 year and 5 months, repeater)

The benefits of cooperation with the prison authority in IWP allegedly include prisoner requests being timely processed, choosing their cellmates<sup>165</sup> and avoiding punishments for rule violations or some negligible financial reward:

*Ilguciems prison is called the ‘snitch zone’ (researcher: why, what does it mean?) because here they snitch more and tell about one another... as I know it's not the same for men... they have phones, why they are not here because they betray each other (researcher: and what's the point?) to be on good terms with the administration... the administration itself offers you to work for them... there are some benefits from the police [prison staff]... you will be placed where you will ask them to... someone was offered some*

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<sup>164</sup> During Soviet times the ‘white house’ was commonly associated with the state and regional administrative offices.

<sup>165</sup> Although this aspect might be more a perceived benefit by other prisoners than real, because if someone is an informer then she would have to live where placed in order to ‘do her job’.

*money, if nobody helps you then they see [the administration]... you provide us with information and we give you some money for the shop... some pennies.*

(Suleima, prisoner of half a year, first timer)

(researcher: what is the benefit of being a rat?) *Maybe previously it was dangerous but now it isn't... their requests get processed timely, they won't have to live with somebody that they don't want to. They turn a blind eye to some little rule violations [just say] oh how come!... such little things.'*

(Isobel, prisoner of 1 year and 1.5 months, first timer)

However, those who are perceived by other prisoners as internal informers are still being punished and while it might not be a physical punishment, they can be verbally abused and mentally tortured by others. If it is obvious that somebody is a 'rat' this counts as a breach of unwritten internal regulations (see Oleinik, 2003, Vavokhine, 2004) and within 'carceral collectivism' there can be no escape from the consequences of perceived or real cooperation with the authorities:

*Our educator gave me work... I didn't manage to do my time for long... I was already given work... girls started to look at me you are offered everything very quickly... they were all the time doing something nasty to me... for two months they were doing everything... you know how they treat a newbie... they thought that I'm with the administration... well I had to put up with it.*

(Suleima, prisoner of half a year, first timer)

Due to the fact that snitching take place secretly the extent and frequency to which it happens remains unclear. None of the research participants acknowledged their personal involvement in providing internal intelligence for the administration, and only one of them personally knew somebody who was asked to become an informer. Nevertheless, it should be certainly acknowledged that the prisoner awareness of this practice created mistrust and enhanced self-control especially in the 'zone' where women felt particularly exposed to the gaze of others (as discussed in Chapter 6). This



extended exposure to other prisoners is predominant within ‘carceral collectivism’ and, while there is no change to shared living arrangements, the system of informers can remain as one of the central techniques for obtaining ‘internal knowledge’ and controlling the prison environment from within. Nevertheless, there are other aspects of inmate-staff relationships that are less hidden and the next section attempts to analyse more day-to-day staff-inmate interactions and their underpinning mechanisms.

### **8.3 Staff- Prisoner Relationships and Underpinning Mechanisms**

Human relationships can be complex, dynamic and changing over time, but they can become a valuable source of knowledge or a useful tool for analysing complex social arrangements and identifying the underlying mechanisms that shape them. This section highlights what shapes staff- prisoner relationships and interactions inside IWP and how they are linked with the past and the current regime. The previous section to some extent addressed this question by highlighting some of the hidden mechanisms like ‘snitching’ that lie beneath the surface of day-to-day interactions. This section focuses on the more mundane dynamics of life inside, which, as argued by Crawley (2004b, p.412), have a ‘greater theoretical importance’.

#### **8.3.1 Pervasive Militarism, Discipline and the Negotiated Co-existence**

One of the first and most noticeable features, which characterise life within IWP is the application of military discipline and protocol. Even if military discipline has withered after the collapse of the Soviet project, it still has a significant bearing on staff-

prisoner interactions. Similar observations of a pervasive militarism have been made by other prison researchers within the post-Soviet space (Haney, 2010; Pallot, 2015; Pallot & Katz, 2017; Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012; Symkovych, 2017; Symkovych, 2018). Military rankings for prison staff have been maintained<sup>166</sup> (although non-attested members of staff, who do not hold a military rank, have also been introduced) and the military protocol is followed, but in a more relaxed way.

The ‘old style’ military discipline and the use of authoritative coercive power could be applied by some prison staff in IWP, but it was seen as the ‘right’ approach by some of the prisoners who talked appreciatively about this practice as it could ensure order:

*Then we have X [prison staff] a very good one... everyone is scared of her, she wants order everywhere... everyone is waking up... everyone is scared of her... at least there is order... if you let [people] to walk all over you they will... it cannot be so... it should be like this.*  
(Dolly, prisoner of 1 year and 3 months, repeater)

Thus, ‘hard power’ can be still preferred over ‘soft’ for establishing order. As frankly admitted by some prison staff, prisoners occasionally should be shouted at as *otherwise some do not understand* (Renate) and this approach was not hidden but openly practiced.

The other military practices include (but are not limited to) demanding respect, for example, all prisoners were expected to stand up and greet the prison staff if the cell was unlocked.<sup>167</sup> Also all prisoners and staff were expected to stand up and give respect to the prison governor and the heads of departments if they were approaching:

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<sup>166</sup> It should be pointed out that the Head of the LPA is a General.

<sup>167</sup> Presumably, this also depends on the official rank of the staff present and whether an external observer is present. However, other women’s prison researchers within the Eastern bloc have made

*In general, subordination is observed in prison what concerns relationships... it's required from us... Subordination is observed with the big bosses none of the officers stand up if I come in.*  
(Marika, prison staff)

The maintenance of military protocol affects the relationships between prison staff and prisoners as well as the inter-staff relationships, as shared by Ira subordination and hierarchical relationships have been maintained, although relationships among staff, similar to staff-prisoner relationships, have become more relaxed and humane:

*With the administration you need to have subordination... I think it's right... there should be respect to your administration (researcher: is there a visible hierarchy?) Yes, a very visible hierarchy. Now you cannot see that much. Previously the heads of departments didn't speak with the officers. The officers were not perceived as humans. If you look at it, officers are doing the hardest job, they are in touch all the time [with prisoners] ... If you have some questions... then you should receive an answer instead of - go and read the law! Now they treat you more humanely.'*  
(Ira, prison staff)

This resonates with Liebling, Price and Shefer (2011b, p.11) argument that prison officers occupy a position, which can be 'both powerful and in some ways vulnerable', a position that within IWP seems to be contested by the higher ranking prison staff and prisoners. Therefore, all those who share a prison environment quickly learn hierarchical rules and regulations or 'who is who'. As shared by one of the prison staff members, she is trying to be flexible and adapt to the staff requirements:

*There are such... [shifts] with which you can talk and there are such shifts that scream – 'close the doors!'... when there is the shift that shouts about*

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similar observations. For example, Haney (2010, p.79) states 'the staff insisted on military-style discipline, requiring inmates to stand at attention when passing by in the hallway. It was as if the prison displayed social artifacts from a bygone era'. A more persistent military-style discipline within women's prisons can be explained by the fact that women's prisons can be referred to as 'red' zones, which mean that the penal authorities strictly control the life of prisoners (Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012).

*the doors I come in quietly and close the doors – well you need to adapt.*  
(Marika, prison staff)

However, the process of communication is not always as straight forward between prison staff and prisoners. More nuanced navigation between care and punishment takes place and the next subsection focuses on this aspect.

### **8.3.2 Blurring the Boundary Between Care and Punishment**

The process of communication between staff and prisoners can be rather complex and not always easily comprehensible. The modes of communication used by some of the prison staff could be confusing and ambiguous, even further blurring the boundary between care and punishment (see Hylton, 2009; Rhodes, 2004; Whitehead & Crawshaw, 2013):

*In general, I have noticed that prison staff seem to be able to change their mood in a few seconds. They can be extremely serious and the next minute they will laugh and be cheerful and then a minute later they are serious again and similarly this also applies to their communication with prisoners. Prison staff can be very strict or say everything in prisoner's face without any considerations of feelings but at the same time they can use such words as 'darling', 'my love', which makes it difficult to tell what is her real position and attitude – is she harsh, friendly or sarcastic?*  
(Field notes)

To some extent some of the communication resembled a dysfunctional family model in which parents can be simultaneously indulgent and neglectful (see Currie, 2005). The 'sink or swim' ethos is a good analogy, as often prison is perceived as a place of last resort or the ground to bounce off for those who are 'drowning' in life. A 'tough love' approach can be applied in order to allow women to reach the lowest point and encourage them to rise upwards, as explained by one of the prison staff members:

*People need to suffer – they need to reach the lowest point so that they understand that they need to deal with their problems and often prison is that place where people realise that there is nowhere lower to fall and it gives them motivation to start changing their life. If people are not allowed to arrive to this lowest point in their life, they might lack the ability and will to change something so by providing a ‘soft landing’ we are providing disservice ‘lāča pakalpojums’ to those who otherwise could be given this possibility to see their life from a clear perspective. You need to feel the bottom to be able to push yourself upwards just like when you are drowning.*  
(Zane, prison staff, services)

In fact, during interviews many younger women compared their relationships with prison staff, in particular with their educators, as to parent- child relations.<sup>168</sup> Similar findings have been suggested by Pallot (2015, p.706) who when studying Russian women’s imprisonment concluded that personnel in women’s colonies, in particular the detachment officer (head) (equivalent to educator in the Latvian context), was ‘represented as a mother figure or, alternatively, a teacher’. Ostensibly, the peculiar position of educators should be further elaborated. Educators (detachment heads) are some of the key actors in organising and managing day-to-day life in the detachment blocks or as highlighted by Pabjan (2009) their main concerns are related to the organisational and legal matters of prisoners. On a daily basis they are responsible for dealing with all of the prisoners’ written requests and observing order in the detachment blocks. They have a significant influence on increasing or limiting prisoner privileges and issuing punishments – both formal and informal. Educators tend to strike a balance between care and punishment via applying ‘dynamic authority’ (Liebling, 2011b; 2014a) and they are some of the most respected members of staff in IWP:

*‘The administration is close to us... they are like educators, like our parents they say it will be better like this and that... they don’t advise us to do*

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<sup>168</sup> Women’s imprisonment historically relied on a maternal logic, which is underpinned by the image of motherhood and maternal ideals that are associated with ‘positive discipline’ (Hannah-Moffat, 2001; see also Liebling, Price and Shefer, 2011).

*anything bad... we can say that we see our administration very frequently and they are like parents to us and if we don't listen then what further... then that person will not have any future and... will constantly return here... really they treat you like their children, yes, they will talk well why? How come? They also go through [issues] with us... they are all women, they all have kids and... they are also babysitting us... they are also looking after the elderly they treat them like their parents.'*

(Annie, prisoner of 3 years and 3 months, first timer)

*I know she'll help us as much as she can. She is like a mother to us, I think I have a better relationships with her than my own mother [in a reference to her educator].*

(Cindy, prisoner of almost 2 years, first timer)

This kind of paternalistic approach<sup>169</sup> within women's prisons has been observed also in other jurisdictions and throughout the history (Carlen & Worrall, 2004; Hannah-Moffat, 2001; Zedner, 1998) and, while it can be viewed as infantilisation (Carlen, 1983; Crewe *et al.*, 2017; Moore & Scruton, 2014), Liebling, Price and Shefer (2011, p.55) have suggested that officers can have a 'paternalistic-therapeutic orientation towards prisoners'. This means officers recognise prisoner problems and are willing to help. Similarly, prisoners in IWP admitted that they are able to receive support from the prison staff<sup>170</sup> when needed and mainly those are prison educators with whom prisoners share their pains and problems instead of specialised staff such as the prison psychologists:

*Our educator is really humane it's not like we are prisoners and that's all... she is like close... others are like you are prisoners and that's it... and there are those who are humane... You can talk with the educator... I was in a*

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<sup>169</sup> Another peculiarity was that women were frequently referred to as 'girls' in IWP, however, this was not seen as offensive by any of my research participants – prisoners and staff alike. As shared by one of the prisoners: 'Yes, they are saying girls 'devuski' because I can call them girls too... there is nothing offensive' (Emily).

<sup>170</sup> Although some prisoners, in particular those with university degrees, raised criticisms and implied that some prison staff require a greater level of competence as: *if they want to change us then how can I [change] if she is the same 'talkative woman' 'bazarnaja zenscena' - competence is needed* (Susan).

*bad state and she really sat down close to me and talked... I was shouting how shall I live ahead... she sat down... and talked.*  
(Dolly, prisoner of 1 year and 3 months, repeater)

*One employee is helping me a lot... she was always close by when I thought I'll crumble down she was close by... it is very good that people are not telling us - you have psychologists go and share [your pain]... it isn't like there is a psychologist and that's why you go and tell everything... not to everyone you can open up your soul... with some you form a bond.*  
(Zaza, prisoner of two and half months, repeater)

Through meaningful relationships prison staff, in particular, educators are able to create more survivable conditions for prisoners (see Liebling, 2011a). The role of the educators seems to bring a positive contribution towards the prison's 'moral performance' (Liebling assisted by Arnold, 2004) (as discussed in Chapter 4). Prison educators and other prison staff members tried to assist women to overcome difficulties and hardships:

*[Prisoners are] talking [with you] all the time, they want to talk, you have to talk because educators are closer than psychologists. [Women are] crying, telling their problems. I don't work here with a computer, because all the time they come in.*  
(Zuzanna, prison staff)

*'Of course, we are not friends... but they are not the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> time here, I know their problems, well first of all those are humane relationships... they see it and feel it very well. If I treat them humanely... with understanding... they respond the same way... and they feel it, they feel every staff member'*  
(Zinta, prison staff, authority)

However, in 'carceral collectivism' all can be involved in providing support and the next section discusses the 'new moral economy of vulnerability' (Fernandez & Lézé, 2011, p.1563).

### 8.3.3 The New Moral Economy of Vulnerability

IWP staff seem to focus on the reduction of self-harm and suicides in prison. In general women's imprisonment is associated with a higher rate of self-harm and suicide (Baldwin, 2015b; Corston, 2007; Sim, 1990). This is due to their complex needs and prior traumatic and tragic life experiences, which include domestic abuse and intimate partner violence (Brennan *et al.*, 2018), poverty, social exclusion, and marginalisation (Corston, 2007; Medlicott, 2007; Gelsthorpe & Wright, 2015) as well as issues with addictions, mental and physical health, education and training, housing and employment (Corston, 2007; Burman *et al.*, 2015; Gelsthorpe & Wright, 2015). As suggested by Gelsthorpe & Wright (2015, p.41) 'women offenders tend to have a history of unmet needs' (see also Crewe *et al.*, 2017). Prison officers in IWP shared a particular preoccupation about prisoner wellbeing and emotional climate in prison (see Liebling, 2011a). Fernandez & Lézé's (2011, p.1563) coined this preoccupation as the 'new moral economy of vulnerability' whereby the preservation of life shifts from a moral to a professional duty:

*We are asking prisoners how they are doing or what is happening in their lives... We are not doing it because we are interested in their lives or that we are curious and nosy... It is for a simple reason that we need to find out the state of mind of each prisoner to ensure calm environment in their cells. We need to know if everyone is feeling fine so that nobody is committing a suicide.*

(Skaidrite, prison staff)

Moreover, the 'new moral economy of vulnerability' is not limited to prison staff alone. Prisoners also can be entrusted to monitor other more vulnerable prisoners despite personal costs and hardships. Hence, the 'duty of care' has been extended to the whole prison community:



*They took me to another cell with two very difficult cases, they said I will be there for a month, but I was there for three months. They had no other place to put those two girls and they asked me if I could look after them. So for three months I was fighting with the drug addicts. It was psychologically hard.*

(Mary, prisoner of 1 and half years, first timer)

In fact, the ‘new moral economy of vulnerability’ can be extended and read in a wider societal context in which prisons become a ‘social refuse of the market society’ (Wacquant, 2002a, p.388) or safe haven for people with troubled life who might have limited available support outside. The assumption can be that their ‘real’ home is in prison where they feel: *like a fish in the sea* (Rita) similar ideas were expressed by other prison staff members and prisoners:

*Many [people] outside think horrible things happen here... but I come to work like to a sanatorium they have here everything like for a pensioner they have everything here unlike outside where they struggle... [it’s] not a prison but resort where everyone takes rest... eat, sleep, the bed linen is changed once a week... washed, groomed... we put all our effort... they go out and again come back the same stinky till they recover again... those who have no living place... who sleep in a ditch and garden houses... they don’t want to go away.’*

(Katja, prison staff)

*They come skinny and scruffy... here they get sorted, how they arrive?!... I was responsible for a remand section and what did I saw there... they get sorted and they go out as ladies but they are back again... I think their real home is here where they come to get sorted... they come here to recover... they come and eat... they don’t feel punished, it’s their home here... they come to meet each other here... as a family.*

(Zaza, prisoner of two and half months, repeater)

Thus, the ‘binary relationships between care and control, punishment and welfare’ (Whitehead & Crawshaw, 2013, p.592) can be fluid and open to interpretation. The lack of available support and an uncaring attitude outside might indeed lead to viewing prison as providing a lifeline for some of the most vulnerable people within society,

who throughout their lives have been ‘let down’ by institutions (Richardson & Thieme, 2018) and individuals who should have protected them:

*‘There on that side nobody cares what you will be doing... you won’t be helped... Many girls who go out actually die just because they have nowhere to live... they start to use drugs... because they go to social services, but they get refused. What should they do?’*  
(Sarah, prisoner of 9 and half years, repeater)

*‘The life outside is very difficult, very difficult when they encounter all those hardships – with work, living place difficulties, household and money problems... all their hardships start after release, because in prison we... try to assist and do everything for her what outside she needs to learn to do by herself, it’s not the same out there... we know them... all about their families, about their children - outside nobody cares about that... [outside] there are opening hours, for every request you have to pay... and all that bureaucracy... it’s not like that here. If she needs any request or help urgently... we try to help... each case for us is individual... and of course... outside it’s not so... In prison they live in cleanness, [they have] warm duvets, food three times a day... a hot meal... regardless whether she has money or not... outside it’s not so – nobody cares have you eaten today or not.’*

(Zinta, prison staff, authority)

Both prison staff and prisoners frequently pointed out failures of the state’s institutions, which instead of serving the people were deemed as ‘representative offices’ that did little to assist those in need. Many criticisms were raised by prisoners, in particular in relation to the work of probation, which was seen as pointless. Emily shared her frustrations and criticisms of the probation service, which is preoccupied with the control function instead of providing any meaningful help and assistance to those in conflict with law. Similar developments have been also observed in other jurisdictions (see Birkett, 2017; Fitzgibbon, 2008; Fitzgibbon & Lea, 2014; Walker, Annison & Beckett, 2019):<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> It also needs to be pointed out that the probation service has a relatively brief history in Latvia (since 2004) and it was introduced based on the Western conceptualisation of the service provision, which at

*'Probation here is an useless organisation, which puts people into prison... you are being required to show your bank card... on what are you living so that you are not selling drugs again... but did you get me a job?... here they simply prey upon you. They come to check on you at 10.06 pm... They are looking at how you are dressed. They try to put you into prison... They are even asking a check from the narcologist. Did you give me some money to have this appointment?... So what for this probation is needed?... It's an unreasoned system... they throw sand in the wheels 'stavit palki v kolosah... they will try to lock you up... what kind of help you are providing?'*

(Emily, prisoner of 1 year, repeater)

The next section further attempts to capture the views and values of those who share post-Soviet prison space, as the post-Soviet context cannot be understood without disentangling some of the values, which are embedded within and closely attached to the Soviet past. By and large, IWP can be seen as a stronghold of Soviet nostalgia and many of the elderly employees and prisoners embraced positive memories about the past.

#### **8.4 'Here We Live as in the Soviet Times...'**

While the demise of the Soviet project seemed to signal the supremacy of capitalism, winning the hearts and minds of the Soviet people proved to be a more challenging process. The rapid and radical social changes created 'winners' who rose to the top and 'losers', which also included the slow changing or non-adaptive 'Homo sovieticus', who were displaced to the most secluded places. Thus, prisons by their very secluded and slowly changing nature were fertile grounds for maintaining the attachment to the Soviet project, and it is in particular within the prison context where

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the time was already influenced by the risk agenda and managerial culture instead of a more welfare based approach (see Fitzgibbon, 2008; Kemshall, 1998).

the battle of the titans is still an ongoing process. It could be argued that prisons in Latvia are the strongholds of Soviet values and nostalgia.

The Russian language has remained as the ‘official’ language of prisons in Latvia<sup>172</sup> a quarter-century after the collapse of the Soviet project, which also contributes towards keeping Soviet sentiments alive. The Russian language is almost exclusively used by both prison staff and prisoners in IWP, and prison staff of Latvian origins can struggle to ‘fit-in’ and experience the language barrier:

*In reality at the beginning... there was a language barrier. From the beginning I was going home and asking my mother what is meant by ‘vospytatel’ ‘educator’... I hear it all day.*  
(Marika, prison staff)

Moreover, it is not just the Russian language that prevails within the IWP context but also a specific internal prison staff subculture has been maintained. This included the adherence to Soviet celebrations and festivities, which as indicated by some members of staff were signs of keeping alive the post-Soviet space. However, there seems to be changes in sight:

*‘The system of punishment changed they [staff] are law abiding nevertheless they maintained this internal staff subculture and they differed a lot from the outside [population]. For example, three or four years ago here they were celebrating 23 of February by greeting men and 8 of March of course all [celebrated]. I saw that for a long time the Soviet celebrations were celebrated here and that is a very good indicator – what you celebrate [is] how you think. They still kept alive this post-Soviet space... An old Russian barge that slowly flows on Volga - that’s how I currently see Latvian prisons, but now it is changing, generations are changing... In portable radios you can hear fifty to fifty Latvian language [being used], because all the time it was Russian.’*  
(Dina, prison staff, services)

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<sup>172</sup> A case *Gatis Kovalkovs v Latvia* (2012) raised the issue of insufficient knowledge of the Latvian language by prison staff and prisoners in Parlielupe Prison (although the main complaint was about violations against Kovalkovs religious beliefs).

While doing my fieldwork I noted how this post-Soviet culture space was further challenged. During the summer of 2016 prison staff were required to speak only in Latvian while using portable radios. When I asked about this requirement to one of the Latvian prison officers the reply was affirmative and in favour of this change: *of course, I agree – it should have been like this long ago* (Marika) whereas a Russian-speaker chose not comment on this matter. Officially, this might be deemed as a progress towards finally bringing the Latvian language inside prison, but the general day-to-day prison communication still remained dominated by the Russian language.

Some prisoners suggested that: *here we live as in the Soviet times* (Dolly). However, this did not seem to refer to the dehumanising Soviet imprisonment practices but to the wider prison staff culture that embraced some of the values associated with the Soviet times. Similarly, as suggested by one member of the prison staff, it is this specific prison staff culture that maintains the close attachment to and ‘romanticism’ about the Soviet past. Haney (2010, p.93) describes this as ‘a state socialist imaginary that continues to have a hold on prison officials’:

*‘Prison is that place in which... many Russian-speakers are employed, in particular within this administration. Yes, they live with those values, those are their values... and in some ways it is some kind of post-Soviet romanticism in which they live and maintain that they are somewhat special or something.’*

(Dina, prison staff, services)

One of the contributing factors of prison staff being able to preserve this attachment to the Soviet culture is the relatively stable prison workforce (see appendix 6 staff profiles). It seems that the prison system relies upon higher moral appeals, which could compensate for the low pay, hazardous work conditions and low occupation prestige (see Crawley, 2004a). As shared by prison staff: *a person needs to have an aim*

*to create safer environment not just to get paid* (Zaiga) and many of the interviewed prison staff indeed talked about the higher moral aspirations of benefitting society, increasing public safety and security as well as working for the state and reducing crime. They sought ‘meaningful work’ that could not be reduced to simply financial gain. Nevertheless, there seem to be concerns that such ‘monsters’ who are willing to work very hard for little pay can become extinct:

*I wish I was happy to receive my wage... when you count your expenditure nothing remains... I tell my daughter what I'm doing here and the daughter is saying: 'for this money!?' ... such monsters will die out' 'takije monstri budet umeratj'.*  
(Zaiga, prison staff)

Many prison staff members raised the issue of low pay and some more critically assessed that prisoners may view them as fools: *prisoners must be thinking that the prison staff are idiots for doing this job and earning in a month what they can earn in a few days* (Shan). Some prisoners also shared the view that prison staff should have a deeper motivation and a calling to work in prison:

*I think a person that works here need to have I don't know what kind of nerves... what kind of patience you need to have to listen to each request... here you need to have a calling.*  
(Zaza, prisoner of two and half months, repeater)

In general, I came to realise that many of the struggles are shared by prisoners and prison staff whether that is inside confinement where ‘they do their time together’, as suggested by several research participants - prisoners and staff alike, or outside where they struggle to fit in the neoliberal system due to lack of resources for ‘living up to the norm’ (Bauman, 2000a, p.207). There seems to be more shared characteristics between staff and prisoners than initially anticipated. During the ethnographic fieldwork I had an

opportunity to observe more ‘sameness’ than difference, especially with those who have spent many years within the prison environment. Many of them shared criticisms about relationships between people, which seemingly have become guided by the individualistic normative system (see Jõesalu, 2005) and materialistic gains:

*Only us – the Soviet people work here. My daughter in jurisprudence [a student] tells me – mother only for a big salary! [she would come to work in prison]... I graduated from university and worked in the kindergarten it wasn't acceptable at that time [Soviet times] to ask what will my salary be? Everything has changed... now people go where they can earn a lot because everything is accessible now. We were very humble - we were very different people... Materialism arrived from other countries. Each individual is thinking only about themselves, each lives separate lives. Everything changed... Everything is materialistic. Everyone wants to live good.*  
(Zaiga, prison staff)

Similarly, prisoners have also noted the pervasive inequalities that permeate the prison social fabric:

*One receives 300 another one 200 [and] some receives nothing... Here some walks around smoking... another one picking up butts... one is walking in 300 dollar boots and a coat... the social differences are too high... some have 300 euro boots and another needs to find something from second-hand.*  
(Zaza, prisoner of two and half months, repeater)

Criticisms were raised not only about the lost values and materialistic nature of social relations, but also about the structural changes within society and labour market, which have disadvantaged and marginalised low-skilled manual labourers who currently struggle to find work. Prison staff pointed out that: *there is no work outside* (Margarita). Similar views were shared by some of the prisoners who criticised the current approach towards facilitating consumer culture and business interests but neglecting the needs of the most vulnerable (see Eglitis, 2011):

*'In Latvia they have built expensive shops in which a normal person with the wage cannot afford [the shopping]... to buy for 300 euros 500 euros one jacket or a coat and later suck your fingers... Nobody is thinking about the nation. They just think to build those expensive shops but nobody needs them... they closed all of the factories they were all destroyed taken down... they built houses but nobody needs them... those who lived on the street – homeless still live on streets, nothing is changing. They are building and building but there is no benefit in that.'*  
(Gina, prisoner of one year, repeater)

Thus, some members of society might experience exclusion from markets and consumption and in the context of 'a downward spiral of neoliberal governance' the responsibility has been 'increasingly shifted from the state to the individual' (Cradock, 2007, p.168) to succeed in life and failure to do so might be attributed to their own personal deficits. The social mobility becomes a myth and an unattainable dream for those at the lower end of the socioeconomic scale.

The harsh competitive realities outside force some of the elderly to reflect on their past life, and this can give rise to the Soviet romanticism. As suggested by Aidukaite (2003, p.410) the Soviet 'authoritarian welfare state', ensured that the basic needs of the people were met. Runcis and Zalkalns (2018, p.369) found that some research participants in Latvia talked appreciatively about Soviet times pointing out that 'adults and young people didn't walk around in mourning but sought meaning and fulfilment in their life. Not all were dissidents, not all ended up in conflict with Soviet power' (see also Jõesalu, 2005). Thus, for some the Soviet time was the best time of life, as it offered opportunities whereas currently survival can be a constant battle, especially for the elderly:

*I was born in the 40's I worked in three, four places [at the same time]... now it's difficult to find one! My pension is 183 euro what can I buy with it now? I grew up in different circumstances; the deficit didn't apply to me. I worked at the central shopping mall. I don't know it was my time. All kids*



*obtained degrees... if now I would have to provide education I don't know, they would sit at home... Now all those with high positions are stealing the small thieves are put into prison... they were stealing also then [during the Soviet times] but well... Once I've been here because I couldn't make ends meet. Second time I'm here because I can't make both ends meet. I wouldn't have fallen so low in the Soviet Union... I miss that time... I lived all my life and didn't know what prison was, but now as I am retired [she is imprisoned]... as Latvian..what this independent Latvia gives me?... Try to survive... you don't have a flat or anything... My all pension went on medicines... but those are not criticisms of the prison but the state where I live and of which citizen I am.*

(Zaza, prisoner of two and half months, repeater)

This also resonates with Eglitis and Lace (2009) suggestions that the older generation residing in Latvia has not only been stripped of financial means but also social capital.

Later Zaza also told about her naivety during the 90's when she was cheated out of her flat. At that time she was not aware of the value of the property and she got cheated by a buyer who simply announced that: *it's business - some lose some win!* All this negative experience since the collapse of the Soviet project seems to result in resentment of the current system, which 'make groups of women economically superfluous, leading them to engage in criminalised activities that land them in prison where they become part of a captive workforce' (Haney, 2010, p.78). Similar experiences and bitterness was shared by other prisoners who struggle to find work after receiving a criminal record:

*There used to be articles (under which a person could be prosecuted) for unemployment. Now you want to work but you don't have work... I wanted to work at X Restaurant they didn't take me because of a criminal record.. two years to queue at the job centre and they don't take you... you need to live... you need to pay your bills... I want to cry... I don't want to live like that.*

(Dolly, prisoner of 1 year and 3 months, repeater)

Prison staff also admitted that it can be difficult for some prisoners to break the vicious circle. Women upon release face many difficulties including struggles with addictions, housing, employment and welfare services while being 'barred from the larger community' and lacking connections to their former community (Pollack, 2008, p.27) including their children and family members. They face personal and socio-economic problems that 'heightens their risk of reoffending and social exclusion (Gray *et al.*, 2016, p. iv):

*'She returns to her garden house... and she understands that nobody needs her... the garden house has remained a garden house; nobody is employing her... and she is in a vicious circle again.'*  
(Zinta, prison staff, authority)

Similar to observations made in other post-Soviet countries (Haney, 2010, p.83) staff view women's problems 'through social lenses', which consider the wider socio-economic and political context. For many women life seems to be a continuous struggle and the punishment does not end with the prison sentence as the human body is the ultimate carrier of the prison boundary (Turner, 2016). But it is not only the prison boundary that is being carried by people's bodies it is also the ideological boundary. For some the dismantling of the Soviet project has been a real shock from which they have not recovered and might never do so as they will never accept or become accepted as a part of the 'new' Latvian society. As suggested by one of the members of staff some might remain loyal to the Soviet based thinking model until they pass away:

*'This Soviet based thinking model can be preserved within those Russian people who live in Latvia, because they had a real shock when the Soviet Union, about which they sang 'our people's Soviet Union' 'nas narodnij Sovetski Sojuz', suddenly disappeared and they remained without a ground below their feet... not all have accepted that their native country is Latvia and not all Latvians have accepted that those Russians who live in Latvia are our fellow citizens and we compose one united nation and for that*

*reason it is very easy for them [Russian speakers] to maintain this nostalgia about the Soviet times because they lived in those lies and they believed in those lies and they will die in those lies.'*  
(Dina, prison staff, services)

## Conclusion

To conclude, this Chapter has captured the clash of the titans or how the Soviet legacy through informal rules, values, and ways of thinking function within the neoliberal system and how this becomes reflected within human relationships. The progressive stage system, as discussed in the previous Chapter, has created a new environment or basis for prisoner and staff relationships; yet the strong presence of the Soviet legacy challenges the key neoliberal principles of self-interest and individualisation. Overall, the change of the prison regime and its ideological underpinnings has seemingly brought prison staff closer to prisoners. In particular, educators have acquired a role of psychologists, social workers and welfare assistants and many women talked appreciatively about their relationships with educators. While some of the prison staff, in particular officers, might apply 'hard' power, educators tend to apply 'soft' power and dynamic authority (see Crewe, Liebling & Hulley, 2014a; Liebling, 2014a). It seems that through the work of educators the moral performance of prison can be enhanced making it more survivable (see Liebling, 2011a).

The Soviet way of life and ideology seems to be driven by the new neoliberal order to the outskirts, to the most secluded places and populations. Prisons tend to provide almost ideal conditions for Soviet nostalgia, as they contain the population of excluded members of society or those who do not 'fit in' in the new order. Additionally

the facilitative institutional culture also plays a vital part in maintaining attachment to the Soviet times. However, the neoliberal regime also provides a counterforce as the transition to a market economy challenged informal rules and ‘understanding’, which regulate relationships and codes of conduct among the criminal underworld. Due to the particular Soviet context of the origins of the code of conduct, the destruction of the Soviet project inevitably had a bearing on the criminals and their ‘laws’, which lost their meaning as the result of changes in ideology. One of the core arguments of this section is that the collapse of the Soviet system was bound to transform both official and informal rules that guided prison society. This is because those rules emerged from the Soviet specific prison management system and ideological imperatives, which in the post-Soviet context were bound to become subjected to change. In conclusion, the prison might be the ultimate large-scale institutional battleground for the two ideologically opposed ‘titans’, and the battle over human hearts and minds is nowhere near the end in the penal context.

## Conclusions

This thesis utilised a multidisciplinary approach, which brought together cultural criminology, the sociology of imprisonment and carceral geography in order to capture the complexity of the prison as an institution. The multidisciplinary fusion helped to form a particular theoretical perspective for studying imprisonment, which ultimately resulted in studying prison spatial realities in conjunction with the socially constructed experiences of those structures and the relationships that develop among people within those structures. In addition, a third fundamental dimension is considered, namely the wider socio-political and ideological context in which the prison operates.

As the main aim of this research is to explore how the ideological rupture after the breakdown of the Soviet project affected penalty, the ongoing struggle between the Soviet legacy and the neoliberal order has been contextualised as the ‘clash of the titans’. This thesis was structured to capture the ‘clash of the titans’ at the macro, meso and micro levels, and this Chapter aims to bring all three levels together in order to provide a coherent narrative of the significance of the ideological rupture and the transition process, which affected penalty and the way penal institutions operate.<sup>173</sup> There is a particular focus on women’s experiences of imprisonment and how these can be interpreted in a wider socio-political context (see Haney, 2015; Wacquant, 2002a). Thus the original contribution of this thesis lies in the analysis of how the ‘clash of the titans’ plays out in women’s imprisonment in Latvia.

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<sup>173</sup> Although some scholars would argue that the transition paradigm now has a diminishing value (Slade & Light, 2015, p. 147).

One of the main findings of this research is that prisons can be seen as the last large-scale institutional battleground for the two ideologically opposed ‘titans’. This is evidenced by the continued attachment to the so-called Soviet romanticism and nostalgia, which exists in a myriad of hidden ways. This thesis reveals some of the contributing factors that have led to this outcome. However, it needs to be clarified that what is meant by Soviet nostalgia and romanticism is the attachment to the Soviet official value system of the egalitarianism and economic security that the Soviet state provided, not to its totalitarian regime, politics of oppression and brutal penal regimes.

First of all, the ideological rupture and the transition process should be understood in terms of what it meant for the people of Latvia. After the collapse of the Soviet project all of the post-Soviet states embarked on a new political trajectory framed by liberal policies, which were presented as the only option (Kotz, 2015). However, each of the emerging ‘new’ countries took a different path of development; although many of the initial struggles of state-building were shared by the post-Soviet states.<sup>174</sup> When Latvia broke away from the Soviet project, for Latvians this meant reclaiming their lost power and finding the voice that had been silenced and marginalised for decades; it was the rebirth of nationhood (Cheskin, 2016). Thus, for many smaller nations, who broke out of the Soviet project, transforming their economies, cultural empowerment and the recreation of national identity were equally important. Similar to Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic (see Haney, 2016), Latvia was

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<sup>174</sup> The trajectory of developments was largely influenced by the initial power-relationships between the emerging states and the central Soviet apparatus in Moscow. Poland, which had a greater autonomy throughout the Soviet period, for example, managed to introduce political and institutional reforms at a more rapid pace (see Krupnyk, 2018; Płatek, 2013), whereas countries that were fully incorporated within the Soviet project, such as Latvia, slower embarked on the route of reforms. Other factors such as the membership of the EU also significantly changed the policy developments and practices within the countries. As evidenced from Bulgaria the intensive external scrutiny and political pressure before and after the EU membership ensured the implementation of reforms (Gounev, 2013).

redrawing lines between inclusion and exclusion. This process marginalised Russian-speakers and consequently a large number of them ended up in the prison, in both capacities as prisoners and prison staff, as many of those who worked for the prison service continued working for the system after the collapse of the Soviet project. This contributed to the fact that for more than a quarter-century after the collapse of the Soviet project, the Russian language remains as the ‘official’ language of IWP and is common in other prisons in Latvia. Nevertheless, recently significant efforts have been made by the LPA to ‘Latvianise’ prisons by imposing restrictions on the official staff communication in Russian (as discussed in Chapter 8).

It should also be pointed out that there has not only been an attempt to ‘Latvianise’ prisons but also ‘Europeanise’ them. While both processes with various successes have changed penal practice, the major European institutions have contributed towards the implementation of the rule of law within policymaking and to a somewhat more limited extent practice. There still remains a significant gap between policy-making and actual penal practice or the so called ‘bureaucratic bubble’ is firmly in place. However, the work of the ECtHR and the Council of Europe (the CPT) should be highlighted. The ECtHR sets a judicial perspective regulating the member state penal institutions and practices. Similarly, the CPT by visiting places of detention can monitor the treatment of prisoners (Daems & Robert, 2017). Moreover, Latvia must follow the EU's 'acquis' and other international standards in relation to criminal justice matters and the treatment of persons deprived of their liberty.

Secondly, the ideological rupture that took place after the collapse of the Soviet project not only established a new form of governance but in essence meant the destruction of the Soviet way of life and its underpinning value sets. Ostensibly, any

substantial shift in ideology requires a creation of a ‘new’ human being who embodies the new ideology and enacts it in day-to-day life. The individual transition from the ‘Homo sovieticus’ (Alexievich, 2016; Zinoviev, 1986) to ‘Homo consumericus’ (Saad, 2007) was almost inevitable. The new agenda presented different narratives in which new heroes displaced the old ones - it was about moving away from celebrating workers to promoting businesses and profit making (Alexievich, 2016). It was meant to be the anticipated ‘grandiose turning point in culture’ (Zinoviev, 1986, p.125) but many people at the time could not realise the magnitude of what was happening or embrace it. For some Russian-speakers in particular, the dismantling of the Soviet project might have caused an existential crisis as they became alien in their residing countries (Alexievich, 2016; Yurchak, 2013). Thus, while the breakdown of the Soviet project and the transition process, in the view of Western society, was a glorious victory for the liberal democracy (Fukuyama, 1989), the universalisation of those ideas proved to be a challenging process for the post-Soviet society.

These significant societal changes also transformed the way punishment was administered and reshaped the prison population, which became less diverse. After the collapse of the Soviet project, punishment slowly returned to its de facto state with the focus on controlling the lowest social strata of society (see Brandariz-Garcia, Melossi & Sozzo, 2017; Pabjan, 2009), which frequently reflects some ethnic and racial disparities (Sudbury, 2005; Wacquant, 1999). In Latvia just like in Bulgaria (see Gounev, 2013) Roma people become over-penalised.

Moreover, prison staff are similarly left struggling to live ‘up to the norm’ as resources available to them are in short supply (Bauman, 2000a, p.207; see also Bauman, 2005). There seem to be many shared characteristics between prison staff and



prisoners and some would argue that they are ‘doing their time together’, in particularly those who have spent many years within the prison environment. Also in comparison to other Western countries, within the post-Soviet space there are more people ‘doing their time together’. In 2018 seven out of top ten countries with the highest prison rate in Europe were the former Soviet countries (led by Russia, Belarus and Georgia) (Slade, 2018). Also when considering the prison population in the EU countries, the ex-Eastern bloc countries annually top the list, which includes Latvia. This is despite the fact that the rate of imprisonment in Latvia has followed a downward trend (see Aebi & Tiago, 2018) ever since the peak period of the late 90s (although the rate of women’s imprisonment has not decreased at the same rate as that for men as discussed in Chapter 3 section 3.4).

IWP, similar to prisons in other liberal market economies, has seemingly become a ‘social refuse of the market society’ (Wacquant, 2002a, p.388) or, as suggested by some of the research participants, a ‘safe haven’ for people with troubled lives who might otherwise have limited life chances and support. While there can be attempts made to assist prisoners in addressing their individual problems during their prison sentences, there seems to be a shared belief that this is a delayed response to many of the issues experienced by the lowest social strata of society.

Many of the research participants were critical of the neoliberal trajectory of Latvia and highlighted the institutional deficiencies and the state’s inability to address the diverse social needs of the people. The prevailing uncertainty in the post-Soviet society or the so-called liquid modernity in which ‘change is the only permanence, and uncertainty the only certainty’ (Bauman, 2013, p.191) seems to cause some of the contemporary pragmatic-nostalgic narratives about the Soviet times and desire for

stability and security (see Jõesalu, 2005). Women in IWP consistently challenged the new liberal political trajectory and its effects on society. Essentially IWP can be viewed as a site of resistance to the dominant culture. However, this resistance is hidden and dispersed rather than cohesive and openly advocated.

## **Inside IWP: the ‘Clash of the Titans’ in Action**

This thesis captures the ‘clash of the titans’ in action through three different lenses: the material, procedural and ideological, and while these three lenses were kept relatively separate in the empirical Chapters, this section will merge them together in order to provide a more holistic view of the women’s experiences of imprisonment and how they manifest the clash of the titans. Three fundamental clashes were identified, namely: *individual vs collective*; *market techniques vs the monopoly of the state*; and *‘soft power’ vs ‘hard power’*. These clashes will be summarised in the sections below, highlighting how they are played out in IWP.

### ***Individual vs Collective***

First and foremost, the ideological rupture introduced the prevailing neoliberal ethos of individualism and the promotion of self-interest (see Klein, 2007; Wacquant, 2010; Whitehead & Crawshaw, 2013), which was a stark contrast to previously enforced collectivisation and commitment to the collective before self-interest (Montaner, 2006).

In many myriad ways this fundamental clash manifested itself in IWP, where the attachment to ‘carceral collectivism’ (see Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012;

Piacentini & Slade, 2015) struggled against the pressure for individualisation. ‘Carceral collectivism’ and its resilience stems from the penal culture. Piacentini and Slade (2015, p.191) suggest that ‘carceral collectivism’ should be seen as ‘a culturally readable frame for social action’, which not only produces a complex normative base according to which people operate within penal institutions, but also ensures stability within such institutions (see also Drake, 2018).

Collective penal sensibilities were embraced through spatial and procedural arrangements as well as the shared sense of and attachment to collective forms of punishment. The spatial arrangements entail living in large multi-occupancy cells (although a significant scaling down in the occupancy levels can be noted since Latvia gained its independence), sharing amenities and a collective way of life. These spatial characteristics also encourage collective self-governance (see Pallot, 2015; Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012; Piacentini & Slade, 2015; Vaičiūnienė & Tereškinas, 2017) and allow the establishment of the ‘new moral economy of vulnerability’ (Fernandez & Léze, 2011, p.1563), which in the context of ‘carceral collectivism’ means collective responsibility and care for the most vulnerable. Thus the ‘duty of care’ applies to the whole prison community and women prisoners are likely to be involved in supporting some of the most vulnerable prisoners.

In general, ‘carceral collectivism’ seems to operate on a premise that women should support each other in difficulties and mental breakdowns. Due to extremely limited opportunities for solitude or a private space (Milhaud & Moran, 2013; Pallot, 2007), these mental breakdowns and other ‘pains of imprisonment’ become visible and ostensibly a shared problem. This, as suggested by women prisoners, generates the ‘truth’ or reality within the prison context; but at the same time, these pains of ‘carceral

collectivism' can be collectively mitigated (see Bandyopadhyay, 2010). This seems to substitute the Western style women's medicalisation<sup>175</sup> (see Carlen 1983; Carlen & Worrall, 2004; Sim, 1990; Worrall, 2002), which has not been embraced to the same extent either during the Soviet times or currently in the post-Soviet penal practices.

IWP seems to rely on the particularities of 'carceral collectivism', which assist in maintaining order. The spatial collectivity ensures 'the polyopticon of all watching all' (Piacentini & Slade, 2015, p.190) and intra-cell enforcement of order. This means that the routine order is upheld by prisoners themselves - women are not permitted to transgress and violate some of the basic personal and environmental hygiene practices. 'Spatialised technologies' (Dirsuweit, 1999, p.75) are also in place to inscribe discipline and feminised values on women's bodies via situating wall mirrors in their cells and other means, which urged women 'to reintegrate into a recognisably 'feminine' form' (Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2009, p.700). Women's imprisonment throughout history has been based on gendered presumptions (Heidensohn & Silvestri, 2012; Liebling, 2009; Zedner, 1998) and IWP has not broken away from this tradition, and this aspect instead of being problematised has been collectively embraced. Gendered courses and activities, which are commonly used across various jurisdictions (see Bosworth, 1999; Bosworth & Carabine, 2001; Britton, 2011; Carlen, 1983; Moran, Pallot and Piacentini; 2009), further contribute towards 'feminising' women in carceral settings as women who offend tend to be conceptualised as 'doubly deviant' - they not only offend against the law but also against their womanhood (Carlen & Worrall, 2004; Heidensohn &

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<sup>175</sup> As highlighted previously this is not only due to the particularities of the 'carceral collectivism', but also due to the chronic underfunding of the penal institutions, which precludes addressing women's problems via medicalisation (the limited administration of drug substitution programmes such as methadone or buprenorphine in IWP serves as one of the examples).

Silvestri, 2012; Lloyd, 1995). In particular, women's role of nurturing and caregiving has been protected through the 'maternal mandate' (Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012). A specific unit within IWP provides a space for women to realise the maternal role and perform motherhood duties. Overall women's punishment reflects and amplifies the oppression and social control endured by women outside (Carlen, 1998; Gelsthorpe & Wright, 2015; Howe, 1994; Moore & Scraton, 2014; Omelchenko, 2016).

While 'carceral collectivism' seems to embrace collective penal self-governance (Pallot & Piacentini assisted by Moran, 2012; Piacentini & Slade, 2015) and provide opportunities for agency (see Dirsuweit, 1999), it can also lead to debilitating effects through the excessive use of coercion, emotional violence and abuse. Despite the overall pacification of the prison environment and rarer occasions of physical violence, emotional tensions can be high as women are not only constrained in space but also forced to face the day-to-day inescapable reality of living side-by-side with each other.

Despite the seeming robustness of 'carceral collectivism' the notion of 'collective' has become eroded. It was frequently suggested that women have changed – they have become less cohesive and willing to engage in collective activities, even if spatial arrangements still embrace communal living. Women prisoners also acknowledged that the prison subculture and the illicit law or 'understanding' 'ponjatije' has ended. Similar findings have emerged from research in other post-Soviet countries such as Russia (see Katz & Pallot, 2018; Oleinik, 2003), Lithuania (see Slade & Vaičiūnienė, 2018; Vaičiūnienė & Tereškinas, 2017), Poland (see Pabjan, 2009), Ukraine (Symkovych, 2017; 2018).<sup>176</sup> This can be partly attributed to the particular

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<sup>176</sup> Although research findings from Georgia suggest that the thieves-in-law and 'carceral collectivism' can be resilient (Piacentini & Slade, 2015).

Soviet context in which the code of conduct originated (see Galeotti, 2018; Varese, 1998; Vavokhine, 2004). The destruction of the Soviet project inevitably had a bearing on the informal regulations - they lost their meaning as the result of structural and ideological changes.

The 'new' system (the so-called progressive stage system), which replaced the Soviet way of organisation of penal institutions in Latvia, was based on the neoliberal trope of individual responsibility (Crewe, 2009; Kendall, 2002; Liebling, 2011a; Peck & Tickell, 2002; Wacquant, 2009; 2010) and the 'mobilitarian ideology' (Mincke, 2017; Mincke & Lemonne, 2014). The individual progression through the system became the driving force and an aim in itself as it ensures prisoner access to certain liberties and entitlements, although many of these require additional access to financial resources. Thus, imprisonment has become an individual 'enterprenerial journey' through different spaces and regimes or, as suggested by Mincke (2016, p.26), 'being a prisoner is no longer a state but a path'. The ultimate incentive for the progression is the possibility of early release, which is seemingly used by prison staff to motivate women to be compliant with the rules and progress through the system. However, this is rather illusionary as despite successful progression through the system and the low risk assessment score assigned by prison staff, the final decision is taken by the judge who equally takes into consideration external factors such as conditions at home and employment opportunities. These latter aspects preclude women with limited support from outside to apply for early release and the assumption can be that their 'real' home is in prison where they are taken care of as outside 'nobody cares'. This leads to the next fundamental area of the 'clash of the titans', which is represented by the state's retraction from welfare provision (Aidukaite, 2003; Aidukaite, 2009; Bohle &

Greskovits, 2012; Vanhuysse, 2009; Wacquant, 2009) and its increasing exposure to market techniques.

### ***Market Techniques vs the Monopoly of the State***

The transition process from socialism to a market economy meant the construction of a new social order based around capital. This replaced the Soviet state's monopoly and essentially the market became the universal law governing social existence (Somek, 2011) or as suggested by Harvey (2007, p.3) the process of neoliberalisation brings all human actions 'into the domain of the market'.

Latvia, as in other post-Soviet countries during the transition period, tried to adjust to the demands of a market economy and imprisonment was not excluded from the pressure for change. However, this was a slow process and there still seems to be a significant resistance to the 'marketisation' of the criminal justice system. Thus, in comparison to some of the leading neoliberal countries such as the USA and the UK (see Christie, 2000; Fitzgibbon & Lea, 2014; Fitzgibbon & Lea, 2018; Klein, 2007; Wacquant, 2009), the 'marketisation' of the penal institution in Latvia seems to be modest. The state has not subcontracted prison management to private companies - the process of subcontracting and outsourcing applies only to ancillary services and even this seems to be rigorously regulated by the state.

However, for prisoners in IWP this modest 'marketisation' meant that access to certain services and facilities has become dependent on the availability of financial resources. Entitlements and certain rights, which were previously granted free of charge, for example, conjugal visits and phone calls have become 'marketised'. This implies

that in order to obtain entitlements not only exemplary behaviour is needed but also access to financial resources. It can be argued that increasing levels of privileges become entangled with access to financial resources, which contributes towards the erosion of solidarity and mutual aid in prison. If previously women were more likely to mitigate the Soviet inhumane regime and severe deprivations by assisting one another, in particular, during the gulag times (see Aizupe, 1974; Ginzburg, 1967; Celmina, 1986), then currently prisoners seem to rely on finding cracks within the system, or getting assistance from the prison staff in return for obedience and cooperation. Similarly as found in Poland, the high level of integration among prisoners has disappeared (Pabjan, 2009).

In fact, establishing relationships-for-intelligence (see Liebling, 2011a) has mutual benefits for those involved in this 'transaction'. For prison staff this means securing order and gathering internal intelligence in conditions where non-human technologies are not available. Whereas for prisoners this kind of cooperation can be seen as favourable due to several personal benefits such as their requests being timely processed, some punishments for rule violations being avoided and possibly securing some negligible material support. Considering already previously discussed pressure for individualisation, women might be more likely to cooperate with the prison administration. They can choose to prioritise their individual gains over the collective interests of fellow prisoners (although at times these can merge), and for some this might be the most viable strategy for gaining access to resources while serving their prison sentence. Overall, as in other jurisdictions 'the relative lack of economic bargaining power in women's prison leads to higher levels of 'snitching'' (Liebling, 2009, p.20).



However, there can be repercussions for those who might be perceived as ‘snitches’. Those who cooperate with prison staff can be punished by fellow prisoners and the ‘real’ or perceived ‘snitches’ can be abused and ostracised. This type of surveillance and a system of informers can be seen as part of the Soviet legacy (Piacentini & Slade, 2015), which also nowadays prove to be highly valuable due to the lack of technological solutions for maintaining safety and security in carceral space. In addition, shared communal living arrangements make this a viable strategy. Thus, the prison administration still relies on an enhanced version of panopticon or mutual surveillance techniques, which imply that there is no need to scrutinise prison architecture and its internal design as humans can be used instead of non-human technologies for enforcement of security and surveillance. The persistence of this technique causes social atomisation (see Los, 2002), anxiety and mistrust among women, which within IWP can further erode ‘carceral collectivism’.

Women might choose different approaches in order to survive imprisonment. Those women with limited family support try to obtain employment either with a private entrepreneur (if meeting the work standard requirements) or within IWP itself in an official capacity (e.g. in prison maintenance, if deemed as trustworthy) or illicitly (e.g. as an informant). Women can also engage in other informal ‘work’ opportunities by providing certain services for other prisoners such as laundry washing or covering the daily rota cleaning duties for those who can afford to pay ‘wages’. The internal currency for prisoners can be cigarettes or other consumable goods, usually tea or coffee. Moreover, women can ‘shop’ around each other’s wardrobes but if caught exchanging or selling clothes they can be punished.

Overall, it seems that IWP embraces a mixed economy model, in which the state benefits from applying market techniques, as it is able to retain income gained from, for example, charging for electric equipment, conjugal visits and other privileges that are dependent upon both prisoner's overall behaviour and performance and the availability of financial resources. At the same time private enterprises are competing to provide subsidiary services such as supplying certain goods (food supplies) or services (telecommunication system) and private enterprises are also able to operate their businesses from IWP by employing prisoners, but this practice seems to be more restricted than open to competition (for many years the same range of companies seem to operate in prison). Thus, to some extent there is some resistance against managerialism, privatisation and making profit out of prison labour. However, those were not only market techniques that challenged the prison system, in essence a major shift in the power structures took place and this leads to the ultimate fundamental clash between 'soft power' and 'hard power'.

### ***'Soft Power' vs 'Hard Power'***

The Soviet project operated on the premises of 'undisputed' authority and power- 'the power of the people', which eventually was turned against them. However, while attempting to break away from the iron fist and culture of 'undisputed' authority the market orthodoxy masterfully imposed its own constraints by placing restrictions in the way every day was to be lived (Harvey, 2016). This shift is also manifested in the prison system. The inhumane and authoritarian Soviet prison regime, which relied upon the use of 'hard power', i.e. harsh discipline imposed by prison officials, including hard labour (Applebaum, 2003; Ginzburg, 1967; Solzhenitsyn, 1974) and internal hierarchies,

gradually dissipated and shifted towards the use of ‘soft power’ via the progressive stage system and ‘dynamic authority’ (Liebling, 2011b; Liebling, 2014a). A rights-based approach emerged in Latvia similar to other post-Soviet countries, which can be referred to as ‘the rise of rights consciousness’ (Pallot & Katz, 2017, p.201).

This development of legal consciousness can be attributed to the deeper integration into Europe and increased international scrutiny. In practice, this development inside prison meant that the power dynamics between prisoners and prison staff changed. Prisoners became not only more aware of their rights but also actively demanded that these rights are met. This includes but is not limited to: food provisions, which currently include a vegetarian option; sanitary arrangements and access to running water throughout the day and at least 4 m<sup>2</sup> living space for each prisoner in a shared accommodation; increased access to means of communication; and an opportunity to visit specialised prison workers such as psychologists and social workers. Thus, prisoners seem to have gained power through the transition process, particularly with the implementation of legislative changes, which largely followed the guidelines and recommendations set by the international organisations such as the Council of Europe and the ECtHR. In this process prison staff had to give up the undisputed authority on which premise the Soviet penal system operated.

However, it was a gradual shift. The breakdown of the Soviet project in the early 90’s brought an interim period, which by using Bauman’s (2013) definition can be called a time of interregnum, in which the Soviet rules broke down and the new rules were still to be created. During this period prisoners could experience greater ‘liberties’, but this came at the cost of increasing levels of violence and insecurity in prison. However, the introduction of the progressive stage system in the mid 90s’ assisted this

transition by setting a new model of prison management. The progressive stage system meant moving away from one general prison regime applied to all women in IWP to a multifunctional prison system in which prison was divided into different zones (remand, high security and low security as well as other specialised units as discussed in Chapters 6 and 7). This new style of prison management steadily placed the prison regime under control.

However, this was a different type of control as it meant operating the prison through practising liberty or governing through freedom (see Rose, 1999) as this became the structuring theme of Latvia after the breakdown of the Soviet project. Governing through freedom implied changing the mode of authority and the use of power in prisons. By applying Crewe *et al's* (2014a) framework, the Latvian prison system moved away from 'heavy' to 'light' use of power. 'Soft power' was preferred over the 'hard', and 'mobilitarian ideology' helped to achieve prison legitimacy, as immobility in this hypermobile world leads to 'a desynchronisation with the society' (Mincke, 2017, p.245). Greater legitimacy was also achieved by the deployment of 'dynamic authority', which implies that prison staff attempt to mitigate a legitimacy deficit through constructive staff-prisoner interpersonal relationships (Liebling, 2011b; Liebling, 2014a). Some prison staff, educators (detachment heads) in particular, have acquired the roles of psychologists, social workers and welfare assistants. It seems that through the work of educators the moral performance of prison can be enhanced, making it 'more survivable' (Liebling, 2011a, p.532).

At the same time, some 'old style' military discipline can still be applied by some prison staff, and this strategy can be preferred by some prisoners as well because it can ensure order and delineate clear boundaries, which in turn produce predictability

and certainty. These outcomes are much desired within prison settings (see Fairweather, 2000). Thus, at times the ‘hard power’ is still preferred over ‘soft’. However, while during the Soviet period the use of ‘hard power’ was ‘legitimised’ through the authorities’ commitment to building the communist utopia and a substantial welfare provisions for those on the other side of the wall, currently such inhumane treatment cannot be legitimised.

International scrutiny increased the transparency and accountability of penal practices and the possibility to instigate court proceedings, which hold the state accountable for the implementation of certain rights and protections provided by international conventions. States can be held accountable for breaching the latter. Imprisonment can no longer embrace ‘collective’ sufferance as it used to during the Soviet project, although as highlighted above there are reminiscent attachments to the notion of the collective nature of punishment. Overall prisoners are no longer supposed to suffer for the sake of the collective, but rather for their own personal ‘deficiencies’ (see Wacquant, 2008). Risk and need assessments are deployed to improve individual capacity to deal with personal issues and shortcomings as well as building resilience, which is all part of the process of rehabilitation. As suggested by Liebling assisted by Arnold (2004) prisoners can be viewed as participants in the ‘compliance project’, in which prisoners can be seen as rational actors who can make choices and decisions based on the system of incentives and disincentives or costs and benefits, which essentially should determine their actions (Crewe, 2009; Kruttschnitt & Gartner, 2005).

In summary this shift from one all-encompassing belief system (see Bourdieu, 1998) to another (from socialism to capitalism) via the ideological rupture of the ‘90s, has resulted in a different flow of power inside IWP. This flow of power incorporates

different means of rule enforcement techniques, which rely on ‘soft’ but more ‘manipulative’ approaches to establish order (see Crewe, 2007). However, the ‘soft power’ cannot be attributed only to the new progressive stage system as it also encapsulates the Soviet value system and, while the procedural mechanisms resemble that of the neoliberal criminal justice system, the prison regime and material ‘reality’ still has echoes of the past and the Soviet collectivist approach to punishment. For example, keeping busy and providing work in prison remains one of the core concerns of prison staff (see Haney, 2010; Tolokonnikova & Žižek, 2014), but the difference lies in the apparent voluntary submission to work by prisoners instead of the coercive obedience and submission, which was prevalent during the Soviet regime. Thus while the rationale might be the same, the mechanisms of enforcement and the power of coercion have changed.

## **Concluding Reflections**

While this research was carefully designed methodologically and within the remit of the researcher’s abilities, various challenges have emerged from this study. Due to the fact that this research initially intended to study men’s imprisonment in Latvia, the lens through which imprisonment was viewed was to some extent influenced by the literature on men and their experiences of imprisonment. Consequently, the focus shifted towards researching the prison in its own right; as an institution through which the state delivers institutionalised violence, pain and suffering (Carlen, 2002b; Scott, 2015). While institutionalised delivery of pain and suffering to various degrees and levels of severity has always accompanied the prison as an institution, the techniques of

delivery of punishment have evolved, and this research focuses on those evolving technologies of coercion and control, which in Latvia changed considerably after the ideological rupture in the 90s. Thus, the central focus of this thesis is on the ideological rupture and its effects on life inside prison.

This thesis also aims at highlighting the resilience and strength of post-Soviet women, as for many decades, they have survived under the ‘double burden’ imposed by Soviet ideology (work) and cultural practices (family nurturer and carer) (see Pallot & Katz, 2017; Žilinskienė, 2018). I would like to point out that some of the strongest and most resilient women I have ever encountered were serving their sentence in IWP, and that is how I would like to portray them: through the prism of strength and survival.

This is the first study of women’s imprisonment in Latvia that utilised an ethnographic approach and there was considerable resistance towards the selected method of data collection. I experienced significant difficulties and ‘breaking into’ the post-Soviet carceral space on all levels: bureaucratically, physically and emotionally - building trust and rapport, was not easy. It should be acknowledged that this research is based on limited and controlled access to IWP – an issue that is shared by many prison researchers within this region (see Michalon, 2013; Milhaud & Moran, 2013; Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2009).

Another challenging aspect is data integrity or the scope and the quality of data. First, most of the research participants were selected by the prison officials, although this seems to be a common practice in prison research (Moran, Pallot & Piacentini, 2009; Quina *et al.*, 2007). In addition, for most of the interviews I was not allowed to use a digital recorder - I had to transcribe and translate information (if the interview was

in Russian) in real time. Thus, I focused on noting down the main flow of the interview with no record of pauses, sighs and other details, which can enrich data by engaging with the ‘unconscious dynamics’ (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008, p.305). In addition, the translation process added another challenge to data authenticity as women did not express themselves in the language in which their ideas have been communicated in this thesis and many cultural particularities and expressions were lost in translation (see Gray, 2006). Also as this study applied an ethnographic approach there are significant issues of representativeness and transferability of findings, hence a reflexive analysis was used in order to generate modest empirical and theoretical generalisations (see O'Reilly, 2009).

In essence this study captured the changing landscape of penalty and women’s imprisonment in a post-Soviet state – Latvia; a label with which Latvian penal policy makers no longer want to be associated. However, the day-to day realities in prison are more closely aligned with the Soviet past than the trends of the West. Prison service seems to still be remote and secretive and willing to hide and to some extent protect the Soviet legacy.

The physical space of IWP can be seen as one of the most notable aspects of the Soviet legacy, which preserves visual reminders of the Soviet past. Even if the prison regime has been significantly transformed by the progressive stage system, the regime is enforced by many who grew up under the Soviet regime, which structured their understanding and interpretation of the world (Pallot & Katz, 2017). Similarly, this also applies to prisoners who shared the criticisms of the neoliberal order and the free market society, which lacks moral basis (see Rawlinson, 2010). Thus, I would argue that IWP



in its purest form has become a site of resistance to the dominant culture and the last large-scale institutional battle ground for the two ideologically opposed ‘titans’.

Nevertheless, while the ‘clash of the titans’ was the central focus of this thesis there are other significant streams of influences. ‘Europeanisation’ in its broadest sense, by promoting a rights based approach and shared values across European countries, is one of the major movements that has had a significant impact on the way life is conducted on the both sides of the prison wall. The empirical data in this research has evidenced the ‘clash of the titans’ in action or the struggle between the neoliberal politic and the Soviet legacy in a women’s prison in Latvia. However, ‘Europeanisation’ and a rights based approach as is embedded in the Council of Europe ethos might emerge as the leading trajectory that shapes the future development of penal policy and practice in Latvia. This could lead to a further reduction of the use of imprisonment for women in Latvia.

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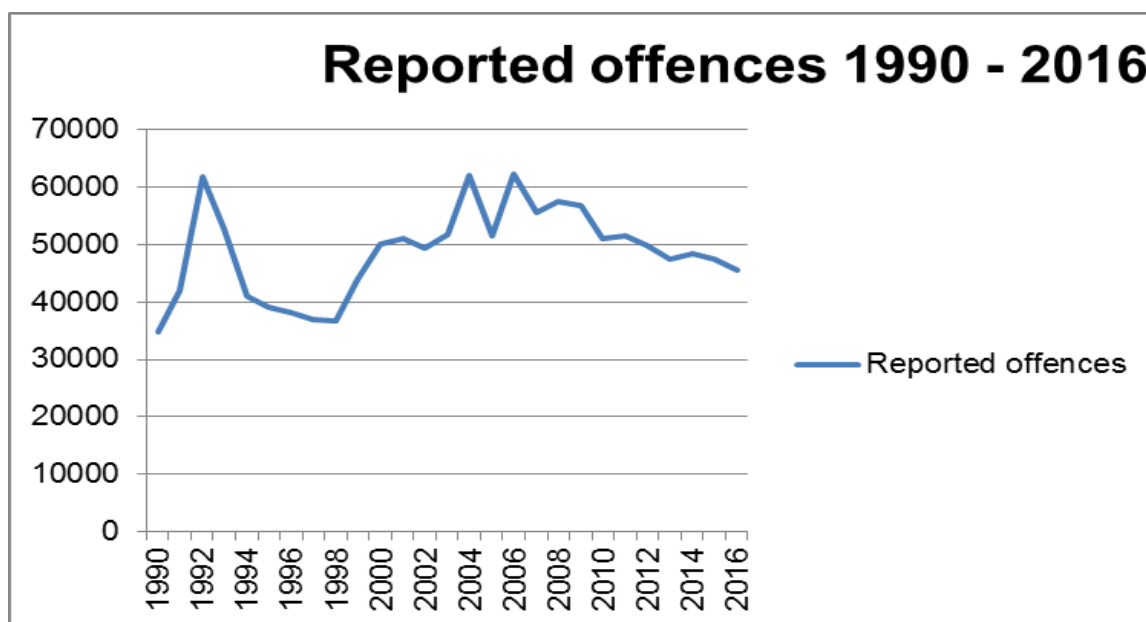
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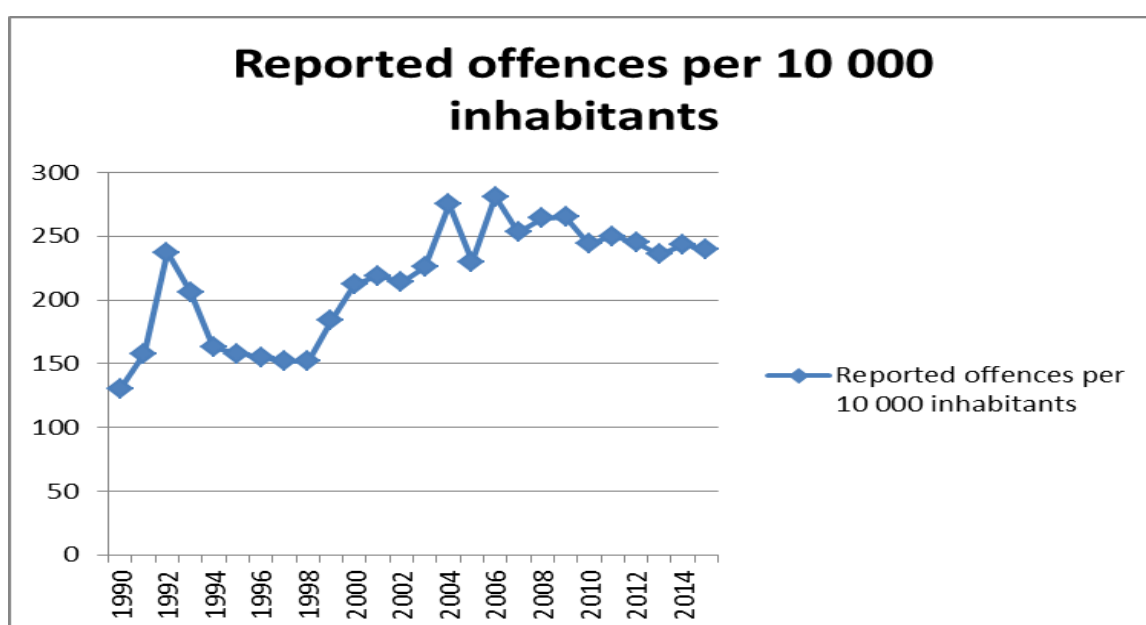
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## Statistical Data

Figure 3 *Crimes Recorded by the Police*

(CSBL, 2017a)

Figure 4 *Reported Offences per 10 000 Inhabitants*

(CSBL, 2017b)

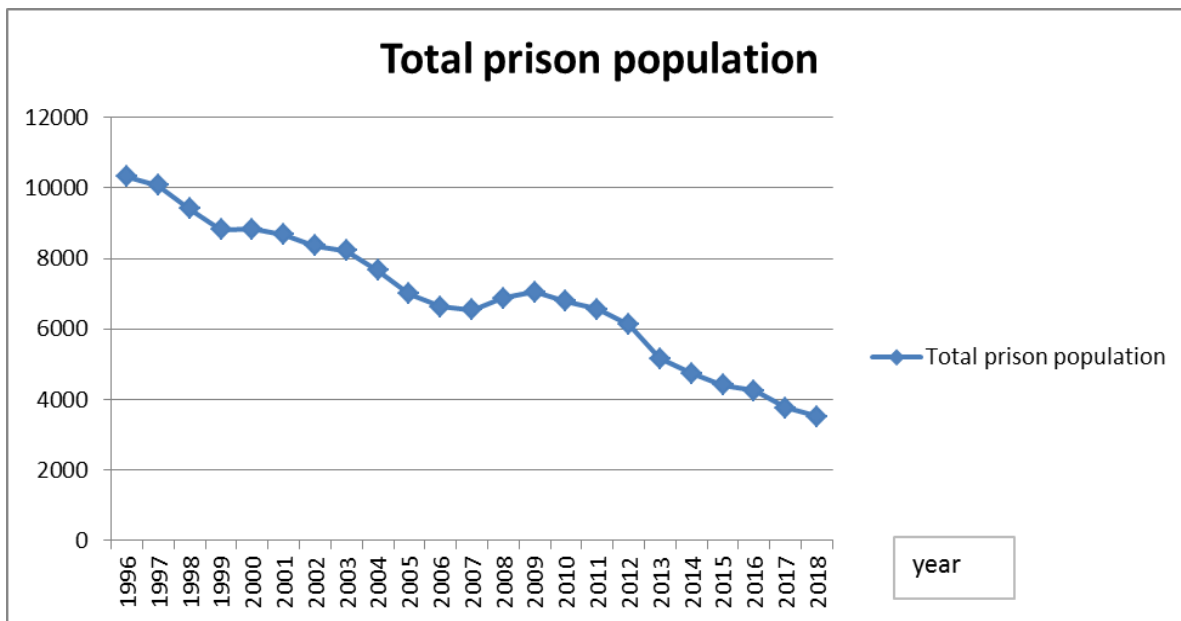


Figure 5 *Total Prison Population 1996-2018*  
(CSBL, 2019b)

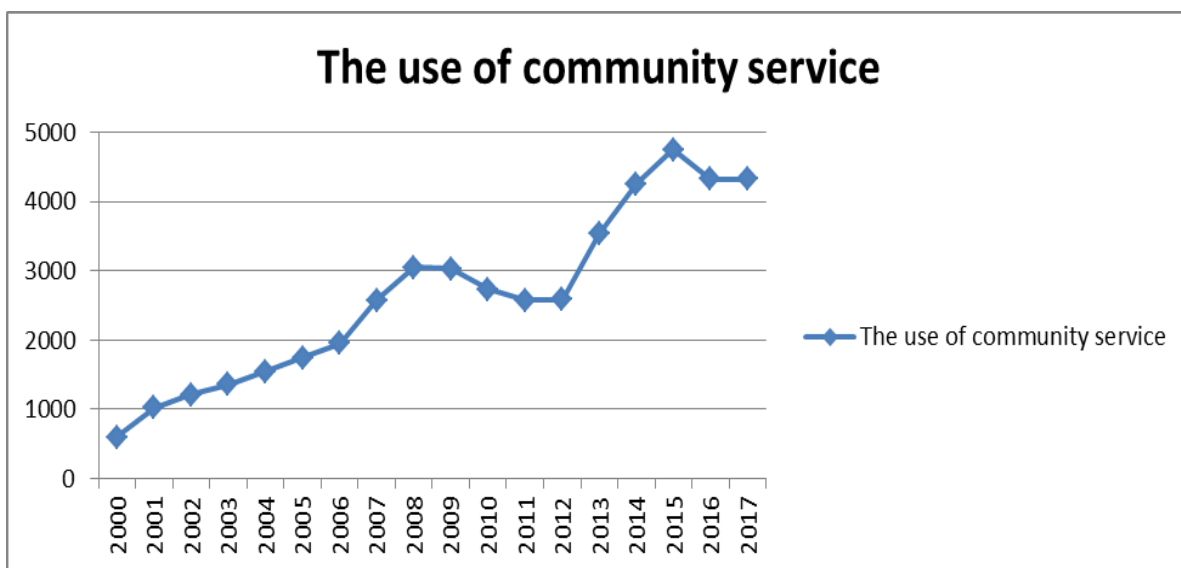


Figure 6 *Use of Community Service*  
(CSBL, 2019a)

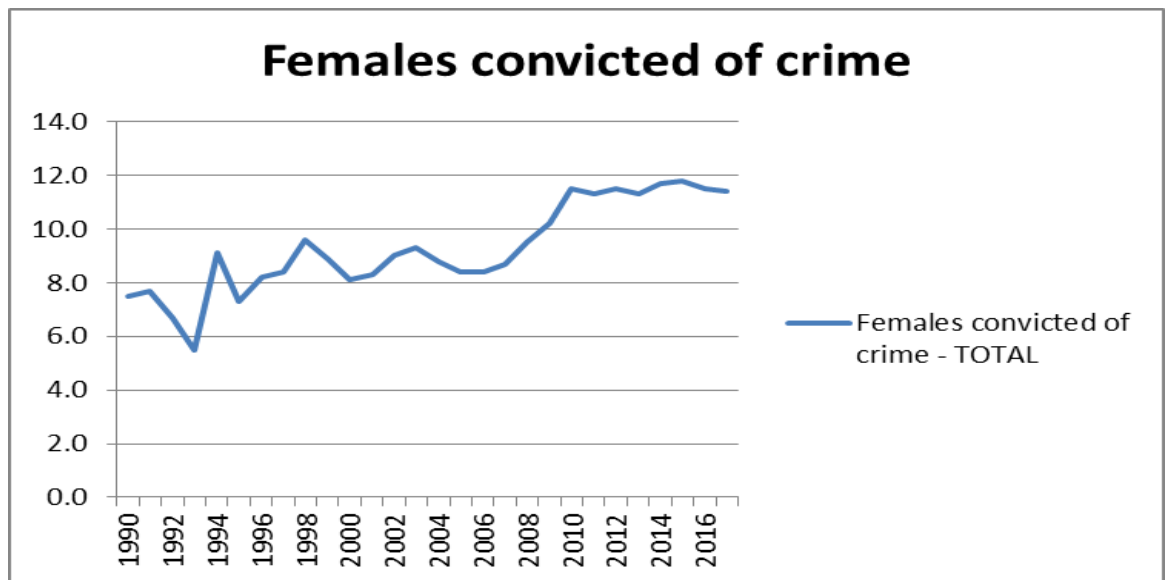


Figure 7 *Females convicted of crime*

(CSBL, 2018)

Year	Number of female prisoners	Percentage of total prison population	Female prison population rate (per 100,000 of national population)
2000	405	4.6%	17.0
2005	416	5.4%	18.5
2010	402	5.7%	19.0
2015	343	7.2%	17.3
2018	291	7.7%	15.1

Figure 8 *Female prison population: trend*

(Institute for Criminal Policy Research, 2019)



### A Prison Poem

#### Здесь такие живут, а потом умирают

Здесь такие живут, а потом умирают,  
И этим народом, народ управляет.  
Интриги, подставы и драки за власть,  
Здесь можно подняться, а можно упасть.  
Здесь рушатся семьи и вновь создаются,  
За честь и за власть здесь насмерть дерутся.

И разум здесь наш понимается силой,  
И умный соседствует рядом с дебилом.  
Здесь можно базарить, а можно молчать,  
Но нужно за слово своё отвечать.  
Порою здесь вены от злости вскрывают,  
И в счетах с законам, здесь с жизнью кончают.

Здесь могут тебя с потрохами продать,  
Здесь есть и такие - убившие мать.  
Здесь карты играюти песни поют,  
Стихи сочиняют и в душу плюют.

Здесь часто стукачати пайку крадут  
И часто бывает друзья предают  
И вновь засыпают ночные дома  
Вокруг той страны, что зовется тюрьма,  
Где слёзы горячие плавят металл,  
Я той стране свою юность отдал!

/Автор неизвестен/

### **Here such people live and later die**

Here such people live and later die,  
And here some people rule over others.  
Plots, tricks and fights for the power,  
Some will rise, but some will fall.  
Here families fall apart and new ones forged,  
Here you can die fighting for honour and power.

And here minds are coerced by sheer force,  
And here the smart co-habits with the moron.  
Here you can talk and also keep silent,  
But for your words you will have to answer.  
Hiding cut veins that were sliced in anger,  
And the enforcement of laws will end the lives of transgressors.

Here your body can be sold entirely,  
Here there are those who have killed their mother.  
Here they are playing cards and spiting in soul,  
Here frequently rat and food goes missing.

And often your friends betray you  
And while night falls on the houses outside  
Within the walls of the place, which is called prison,  
Where the hot tears melt the metal,  
I have given my youth!

/Unknown author/ translated by author

# Interview Schedule for Prisoners

## Prison Space, Social Control and Relationships in the Post-Soviet Prison

### Background

- Could you tell me please a bit more about yourself and for how long have you been imprisoned and is it your first time here?
- Can you remember how did you feel when you just entered prison, have those feelings changed?
- Could you tell me please a little about your daily routine in prison?
- Are there any differences between daily routines during the working days and the weekend?

### Imprisonment

- Which is your favourite part of the day and which tasks/activities do you prefer?
- Is there anything that helps you to feel good while serving your sentence?
- What is important to you while serving your time in prison and what helps you to overcome frustrations and difficulties in prison?
- Would you regard imprisonment as emotionally and physically challenging if so how do you overcome those challenges?
- What happens if you fail to abide by prison rules?
- What do you do if you have some complaints if you are dissatisfied with something?
- Do you have any aims that you want to achieve while being here?
- What should be the aim of punishment?

### The perception of prison space, order and relationships

- **Prison space**
  - What do you think is a good thing about prison space/ layout, what would you like to change?
  - What would you like to change in prison space or how can prison environment best be improved?
- **The maintenance of order**
  - Which techniques/methods used and practiced do you think work best for maintaining order?
  - Why do you think prisoners abide by rules?
  - What do you think are the main challenges for maintaining order?

- **Support**
  - Do you receive any support from other agencies while in prison?
  - Which service provision is the most important for you personally?
  - If you had a problem, who would you turn to?
- **Work/ training opportunities:**
  - How would you describe available work/training/education during the imprisonment and how does it benefit you?
  - Do you think prison staff is sufficiently trained to work here?
  - Which skills (if any) learned in prison you could use after release?
  - Have you learned any new 'life skills' while being here? (cooking, cleaning, sewing)
  - From what kind of courses/training would benefit prison staff?
  - What kind of training/developmental courses prison staff would benefit from attending?
- **Relationships**
  - **Family and friends**
    - How far are you located from your local area and family/friends?
    - How frequently do you receive visits from family/friends?
    - How difficult is to maintain your relationships with your family/friends outside the prison? How would you improve this?
  - **Staff-staff relationships**
    - How would you describe relationships between prison staff?
    - How would you define a good prison staff (officer) and what characteristics she/he should have?
  - **Staff-prisoner relationships**
    - How would you describe your relationships with prison staff?
    - What do you like/you are satisfied with in those relationships?
    - What kind of relationships are you aiming to establish with prison staff?
    - How do you overcome tensions between inmates and a member of staff?
  - **Prisoner – prisoner relationships**
    - Do you have friends/ acquaintances here?
    - How do you overcome tensions between prisoners?
    - Are there frequent tensions between different ethnicities or are there other issues?
    - Do you form any groups (according to ethnicity/committed crime)?

### The past (if applicable) and future of imprisonment

- **Past**

- Do you recall what the Soviet imprisonment was like?
- How would you characterise the 90s and what was happening within prisons during that time?

- **Future**

- What would you like to change within Latvian prison system?
- How would you like to see the future of this prison?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell me about life in prison? (How would you describe your time in prison?)

# Interview Schedule for Prison Staff

## Prison Space, Social Control and Relationships in the Post-Soviet Prison

### Background

- Could you tell me please a bit more about yourself and for how long have you been working here?
- Why are you doing this job, what is your motivation?
- Can you remember how did you feel when you just started this job and have those feelings changed?

### Employment

- Tell me a little about your daily tasks and responsibilities?
- How does your work differ during the weekends (if at all)?
- Which is your favourite part of the day and which tasks do you prefer?
- What is it that gives you the greatest joy in your work?
- What enables you to execute your job well (resources needed) or what are conditions in which you function especially well fulfilling all your tasks?
- What is important to you about your work and what helps you to overcome frustrations and difficulties in the workplace?
- What are the biggest challenges in your work?
- What should be the aim of punishment?

### The perception of prison space, order and relationships

- **Prison space**
  - What do you like the most about the prison architecture and its layout? What seems acceptable and logical in the way this place is organised?
  - What would you like to change in prison space or how can prison environment best be improved?
- **The maintenance of order**
  - What are the sanctions if an employee fails to abide by the internal regulations, have you ever received any warnings or performance review?

- How are you maintaining order and how are sanctions enforced for prisoners who break the rules? What are the most frequently used sanctions? (Where disobedience is more frequent in the 'zone' or on remand?)
- Which techniques/methods used and practiced do you think work best for maintaining order? (Which is the most effective method that you have applied?)
- What helps to maintain order in prison and why do you think prisoners abide by rules?
- What do you think are the main challenges for maintaining order?
- **Work organisation**
  - What is expected from you as an employee, do you have to achieve any targets?
  - How would you say your work has changed since you joined this service?
- **Support available**
  - What support do you receive if you have any problems at work (psychologist)?
  - How would you evaluate the support available to prisoners (psychologist/social worker)?
- **Work and training**
  - Do you receive sufficient training to do this job?
  - How would you evaluate education/training available to prisoners and work opportunities in prison?
  - What kind of training would you like to attend that would benefit your work?
  - Do you think prisoners use their skills obtained in prison outside?
- **Relationships**
  - **Staff-staff relationships**
    - How would you describe your relationships with your fellow workers/ administration?
    - How would you define a good prison employee and what characteristics she/he should have?
    - How do you overcome tensions between employees? Would you point out that your fellow colleague is doing something wrong?
  - **Staff-prisoner relationships**
    - How would you characterise your relationships with prisoners? What kind of relationships you are aiming to establish?
    - What do you like about those relationships and what would you like to change/improve in those relationships?
    - How do you resolve a situation if an argument between an employee and a prisoner arises?
  - **Prisoner – prisoner relationships**
    - What kind of hierarchy exists within prison, do you think there is a 'caste' system among prisoners?

- Are there frequent tensions between different ethnicities? (Latvian vs Russian or any other ethnicities)
- How do you normally resolve arguments and what are the most frequent causes?
- Does the committed crime frequently determine how women are perceived by both other prisoners and staff?

### The past (if applicable) and future of imprisonment

#### ○ Past

- Do you recall what the Soviet imprisonment was like?
- How would you characterise the 90s and what was happening within prisons during that time?

#### ○ Future

- What would you like to change within Latvian prison system?
- How would you like to see the future of this prison?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell me about work in the prison?



## Interviewed Prisoner Profiles

### A<sup>177</sup>

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
2nd	<i>6 years and 6 month</i>	Drug related	Latvian

### B

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
1st	<i>Long term</i>	Unknown	Started in Latvian but then spoke Russian

### C

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
1st	<i>3 years</i>	Unknown	Latvian

### D

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
1st	<i>12 years</i>	Murder of husband	Latvian

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<sup>177</sup> In order to protect the confidentiality of my research participants, they have been represented with letters instead of pseudonyms, which were used throughout the thesis. Additionally, other interviews and informal talks took place, but they did not follow the interview schedule and for this reason are not listed.

**E**

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
1st	<i>Unknown</i>	Unknown	Russian

**F**

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
1st	<i>15 years</i>	Unknown	Russian

**G**

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
3rd	<i>10 years</i>	Unknown	Russian

**H**

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
5th	<i>Unknown</i>	Theft	Russian

**I**

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
3rd	<i>3.5</i>	Unknown	Russian

**J**

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
4th	<i>4 years</i>	Drug trade	Russian

**K**

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
1st	<i>Unknown</i>	Fraud	Russian

**L**

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
2nd	<i>5.2 years</i>	Drug related	Latvian

**M**

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
1st	<i>Unknown</i>	Fraud	Latvian

**N**

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
1st	<i>5,5 years</i>	Contraband	Latvian

**O**

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
1st	<i>Unknown</i>	Inciting child prostitution	Latvian

**P**

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
2nd	<i>Unknown</i>	Drug related	Russian

**Q**

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
1st	<i>2 years and 4 months</i>	Drug related	Latvian

**R**

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
Multiple	<i>4 years and 6 months</i>	Drug related	Russian

**S**

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
2nd	<i>4 months</i>	Theft	Latvian

**T**

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
3rd	<i>3 years and 6 months</i>	Drug related	Russian

**U**

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
Multiple	<i>Unknown</i>	Drug related	Latvian/ Russian

**V**

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
Repeated	<i>Unknown</i>	Unknown	Latvian/ Russian

**W**

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
2nd	<i>5 years and 1 month</i>	Shop lifting + suspended 5 year long sentence	Latvian

**X**

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
2nd	<i>7 years</i>	Drug dealing	Latvian/ Russian

**Y**

Conviction	Length of sentence	Offence	Language
1st	<i>Unknown</i>	Unknown	Latvian/ Russian

### Interviewed prison staff profiles

Interview number <sup>178</sup>	Work experience (in prison)	Language
01	4 months	Latvian (with a strong Russian accent)
02	17 years	Russian (preferred Russian over Latvian)
03	11 years	Latvian
04	25 years	Latvian (with a strong Russian accent)
05	11 years	Latvian (with a strong Russian accent)
06	15 years	Russian (preferred Russian over Latvian)
07	5 years	Latvian
08	6 years	Latvian
09	2,5 years	Latvian
10	10 years	Latvian
11	9 years	Latvian (with a strong Russian accent)
12	9 years	Latvian (with a strong Russian accent)

<sup>178</sup> In order to protect the confidentiality of my research participants, they have been represented with numbers instead of pseudonyms, which were used throughout the thesis. Additionally, other interviews and informal talks took place, but they did not follow the interview schedule and for this reason are not included in this list.